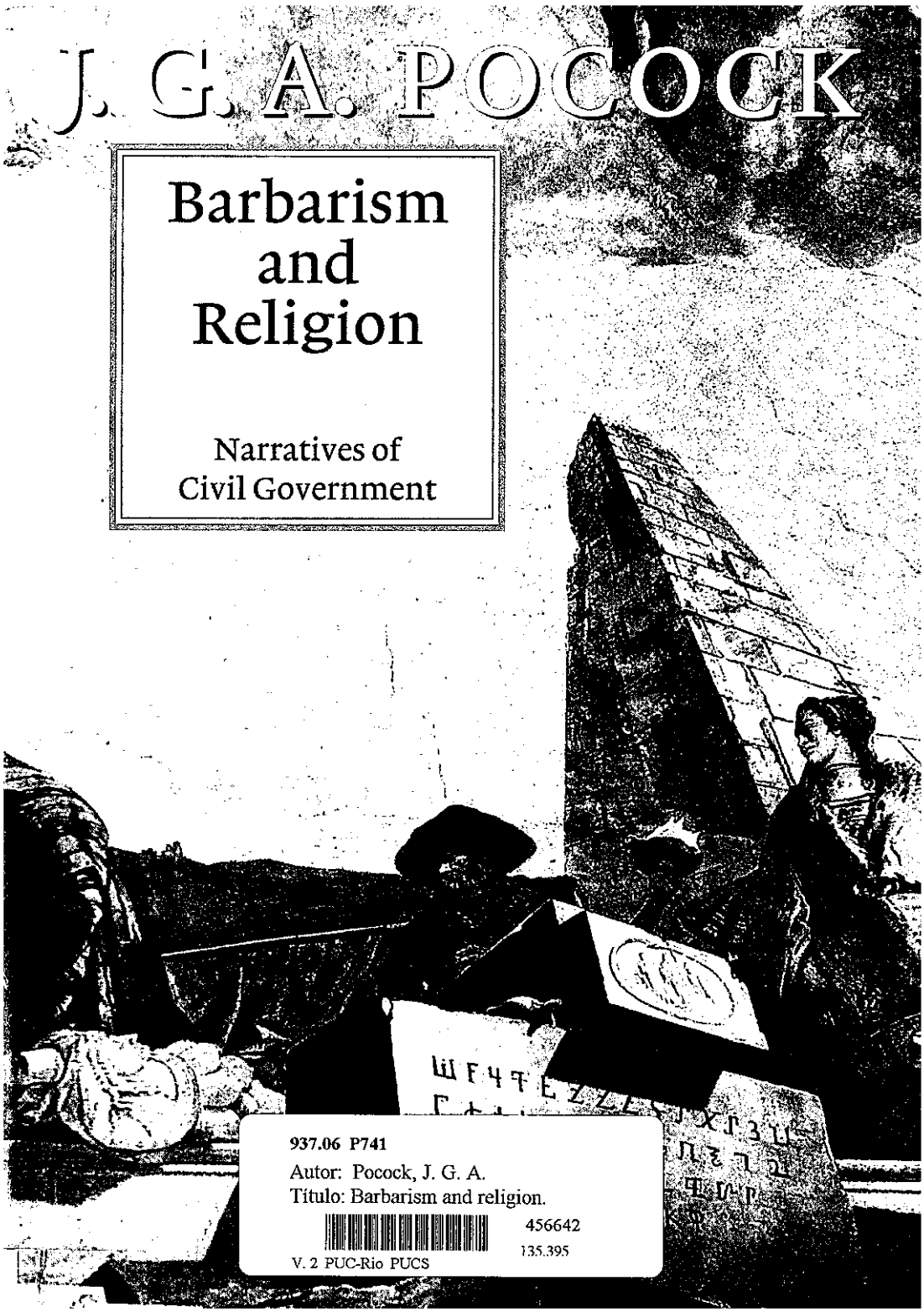
J. G. A. POCOCK

Barbarism and Religion

Narratives of Civil Government



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BARBARISM AND RELIGION

Volume Two

Narratives of Civil Government

The second volume in the sequence of *Barbarism and Religion* explores the historiography of Enlightenment. John Pocock assesses a series of major authors who wrote Enlightened histories on a grand narrative scale, were known to Edward Gibbon and were important in the latter's own work: Giannone, Voltaire, Hume, Robertson, Ferguson and Adam Smith. In different ways they were concerned to write the history of the 'Christian millennium', and then to recount the emergence from the latter of that enlightened 'Europe' of which they believed themselves a part, and which reached its apogee between the Peace of Utrecht in 1713 and the outbreak of the American Revolution in 1776. Edward Gibbon's historical trajectory is similar but at points crucially distinct from this essentially Latin narrative, and John Pocock shows how the decade prior to the appearance of the *Decline and Fall* witnessed an important development in Gibbon's thinking, prompting the recognition that his subject demanded treatment of the patristic as well as the papal church. The volume is also informed by the perception that the integration of philosophy and erudition with narrative is central to the development of enlightened historiography: once again John Pocock shows how the *Decline and Fall* is both akin to but distinct from the historiographical context within which Gibbon wrote his great work.

Born in London and brought up in Christchurch, New Zealand, J. G. A. POCOCK was educated at the Universities of Canterbury and Cambridge, and is now Harry C. Black Emeritus Professor of History at the Johns Hopkins University. His many seminal works on intellectual history include *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (1957, second edition 1987), *Politics, Language and Time* (1971), *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975), and *Virtue, Commerce and History* (1985). He has also edited *The Political Works of James Harrington* (1977) and Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1987), as well as the collaborative study *The Varieties of British Political Thought* (1995). A Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy and of the Royal Historical Society, Professor Pocock is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Philosophical Society.

BARBARISM AND RELIGION

Volume Two

Narratives of Civil Government

J. G. A. POCOCK

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alla memoria di Arnaldo Momigliano

Contents

Acknowledgements *page* x
Note on usage xi
List of abbreviations xii
Introduction 1

PRELUDE: THE VARIETIES OF EARLY MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY 7

PART I CONSTRUCTING THE ENLIGHTENED NARRATIVE

SECTION I GIANNONE: JURIST AND *LIBERTIN* IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN

1 Civil and ecclesiastical history 29

2 Popes and emperors: from the Isaurians to the Hohenstaufen 42

3 Angevins, Spaniards and Gallicans: to the brink of Enlightenment 58

4 Gibbon and Giannone: narrative, philosophy, erudition 65

SECTION II VOLTAIRE: NEO-CLASSICIST AND *PHILOSOPHE* IN THE ENLIGHTENED WORLD-PICTURE

5 On the horizons of Europe: the kings of the north 72

6 Courtly monarchy as the instrument of Enlightenment: the *Siècle de Louis XIV* 83

7 Asia and the dechristianisation of history: the *Siècle* and the *Essai sur les Moeurs* 97

8 The Christian millennium in Europe: the *Essai sur les Moeurs* 120

9 The recovery of civil government, the rebirth of fanaticism and the return to the *Siècle* 137

10 Voltaire: the exasperating predecessor 153

PART II THE HISTORICAL AGE AND THE HISTORICAL NATION

SECTION III DAVID HUME AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND

11 The problems of history in the Hanoverian kingdoms 163

12 David Hume: the *Essays* as contemporary history 177

13 *The History of Great Britain*: Hume's modern history 199

14 *England under the House of Tudor*: monarchy, Europe and enthusiasm 222

15 Hume's *History of England:* the Enlightened narrative in retrospect 241

SECTION IV WILLIAM ROBERTSON AND THE HISTORY OF EUROPE

16 The problems of historiography: the Scottish perspective 258

17 Scotland and the progress of society 268

18 The *Reign of Charles V* and the emergence of the European states 289

19 Robertson: histories written and unwritten 300

PART III THE PROGRESS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

SECTION V ADAM SMITH: JURISPRUDENCE INTO HISTORY

20 Moral philosophy and the stages of society 309

21 Smith's Glasgow lectures: narrative and philosophical history 319

SECTION VI ADAM FERGUSON: THE MODERATE AS MACHIAVELLIAN

22 Ferguson's *Essay*: Siberia as the cradle of world history 330

23 The *Mémoires littéraires* and the *Remains of Japhet* 346

24 Scottish narrative: theoretical and civil history 362

PART IV INTENDING THE *DECLINE AND FALL*

25 The Enlightened narrative and the project of 1776 369

26 'Gibbon's dark ages': the writings of 1765–1772 381

27 Construction of a narrative: the evidence of the *Memoirs* 397

List of References 403

Index 414

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Note on usages

I have continued the practice of supplying translations of passages quoted in languages other than English. These are from eighteenth-century translations where possible; my own only where no other is available. When citing French or Italian from eighteenth-century editions, I have followed contemporary spelling and accentuation; in some cases, however, I have used modern editions and their orthography.

'*Decline and Fall*' in italic refers to Gibbon's work; 'Decline and Fall' in roman to the process it describes; 'decline and fall' without capitals to the concept in Gibbon and other authors.

Since Gibbon's memoirs are of less importance in this volume than in its predecessor, I have not retained the practice of citing John Murray's 1896 edition of the *Autobiographies* in addition to Georges Bonnard's 1969 edition of the *Memoirs*.

The notes throughout the book are numbered by section.

Abbreviations

Bury	J. B. Bury (ed.), *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, by Edward Gibbon. With introduction, notes and appendices.* In seven volumes. London: Methuen and Co., 1909. Reprinted by AMS Press Inc., New York, 1974
EE	Patricia B. Craddock (ed.), *The English Essays of Edward Gibbon.* Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1972
EEG	J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion. Volume I: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon.* Cambridge University Press, 1999
EGLH	Patricia B. Craddock, *Edward Gibbon: Luminous Historian: 1772–1794.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989
EM	René Pomeau (ed.), *Voltaire: Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations.* In two volumes. Paris: Garnier, 1963
Essay	Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995
History	William B. Todd (ed.), *David Hume: The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688.* In six volumes. *By David Hume, Esq. Based on the Edition of 1778, with the Author's Last Corrections and Improvements.* Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983
Ist. civ.	Pietro Giannone, 1723: *Dell'Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli libri XL. Scritti da Pietro Giannone, Giureconsulto, ed Avvocato Napoletano; Napoli, per lo Stampatore Niccolo Naso.* In four volumes. Naples
Journal A	D. M. Low (ed.), *Gibbon's Journal to January 28th, 1763: My Journal, I, II and III, and Ephemerides. With introductory essays.* London: Chatto and Windus; New York: W. W. Norton, 1929
Journal B	Georges A. Bonnard (ed.), *Le journal de Gibbon à Lausanne,*

	17 Août 1763–19 Avril 1764. Lausanne: Librairie de l'Université, 1945
Journal C	Georges A. Bonnard (ed.), *Gibbon's Journey from Geneva to Rome: His Journal from 20 April to 2 October 1764.* London and New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961
Letters	J. E. Norton (ed.), *The Letters of Edward Gibbon.* In three volumes. London: Cassell and Company, 1956
Library	Geoffrey Keynes (ed.), *The Library of Edward Gibbon.* Second edition. N.P.: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1980
LJ	R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein, 1982 (eds.), *Adam Smith: Lectures on Jurisprudence;* Indianapolis: Liberty Classics; 1982. Reprint of volume v of the Glasgow edition of *The Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978
Low	D. M. Low, *Edward Gibbon, 1737–1794.* London: Chatto and Windus; New York: Random House, 1937
LRBL	J. C. Bryce (ed.), *Adam Smith: Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres.* Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985. Reprint of volume iv of the Glasgow edition of *The Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983
Mém. l'a litt.	*Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne. Pour l'an 1767.*
Memoirs	Georges A. Bonnard (ed.), *Edward Gibbon: Memoirs of My Life.* New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969
Miller	Eugene F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume: Essays Moral, Political and Literary.* Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985
MW	Lord Sheffield (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esq. With Memoirs of his Life and Writings, Composed by Himself: Illustrated from his Letters, with Occasional Notes and Narrative. A new edition, with considerable additions, in five volumes.* London: John Murray, 1814
Nugent, 1752	Thomas Nugent (trans.), *The Age of Louis XIV: Translated from the French of M. de Voltaire.* London
Nugent, 1759	Thomas Nugent (trans.), *An Essay on Universal History, the Manners and Spirit of Nations, from the Reign of Charlemagne to the Age of Louis XIV. Written in French by M. de Voltaire.* Third edition. Dublin
Ogilvie	*The Civil History of the Kingdom of Naples, in Two Volumes . . . Translated into English by Captain James Ogilvie.* London, 1729

OH	René Pomeau (ed.), *Oeuvres Historiques de Voltaire.* Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pleiade, vol. CXXVIII, 1962
Smollett	Tobias Smollett (trans.), *History of Russia under the Reign of Peter the Great*, in Voltaire, *Works*, 1906, vol. XXIV. Boston
Womersley	David Womersley (ed.), *Edward Gibbon: The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* In three volumes. London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1994
Works	*The Works of William Robertson, D.D., with an Account of his Life and Writings.* In nine volumes. London, 1824. Reprinted Bristol: Thoemmes, 1996
YEG	Patricia B. Craddock, *Young Edward Gibbon: Gentleman of Letters.* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982

Introduction

1

This is the second volume in a series designed to enhance our understanding of Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by establishing contexts in which it may be studied. *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*[1] followed the earlier part of his life through a variety of encounters with several forms of Enlightenment, paying attention to ways in which these moved him towards the historian he came to be. The present volume explores the historiography of Enlightenment by selecting – it is important to emphasise that other selections could have been made – a series of authors who wrote Enlightened histories on a grand narrative scale, were known to Gibbon and were important in his own work: Pietro Giannone, François Arouet de Voltaire, David Hume, William Robertson and – somewhat removed from narrative proper – Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson. They are considered here not only as resources on whom Gibbon drew or as authorities who may have shaped his writing, but as his peers worth studying in their own right. This volume is therefore an exploration of the intellectual world of the Enlightened historians, akin to Karen O'Brien's *Narratives of Enlightenment*[2] which reached me during the composition of my own work, but leading towards the particular objective of examining Gibbon as a member of this company of historians, intelligible as acting in the context it furnishes. It follows that, with due caution, I treat these writers as establishing norms to which he may or may not have conformed. This is an interpretative device useful to the historian, rather than a historical statement about any pressures to conform which he may have been under.

The principal norm to emerge is that to which I refer by using the term 'the Enlightened narrative'. The historians here studied were all

[1] *EEG*, 1999. [2] O'Brien, 1997.

concerned to write, first, the history of what I further term 'the Christian millennium', covering the eleven or so centuries from Constantine to Charles V in the case of Robertson, or the nine or so centuries from Charlemagne to Louis XIV in the case of Voltaire. This era was in a special sense that of 'barbarism and religion' – a phrase famously used by Gibbon and furnishing the overall title of this series – since it was that in which the Latin-using provinces of the former Roman empire were perceived as dominated by feudal lordships originating with the barbarian invasions of these provinces, and by the ecclesiastical and above all papal jurisdiction over secular affairs exercised by the Roman church in the absence of imperial civil sovereignty. In what might be called its second chapter, 'the Enlightened narrative' proceeded to recount the emergence from the 'Christian millennium' of the political, social and cultural orders in which the Enlightened historians believed themselves to be living and to which they applied the term 'Europe'. Their narratives passed through – without always mastering – the period of the Wars of Religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to recount the emergence of a system of strong sovereign states, both multiple monarchies and confederations, linked together by treaties and commerce to a point where 'Europe' could be considered (despite its wars) a republic or confederation, and practising a reason of state which was an index to their capacity to conduct civil government undisturbed by papal monarchy or confessional anarchy. This system of states was supported by, and might be thought the outward expression of, a cultural system of shared manners, possible only in a deeply commercial civilisation, which cemented the relations between both Enlightened Europeans and European states. The 'Enlightened narrative' thus set itself to be both a historiography of state and a historiography of society, and took as its telos the ideally Enlightened system existing (roughly) between the wars of the Spanish succession and the American and French revolutions. The historians studied in this volume, however, were not under the illusion that this 'Europe' was either unproblematic or unthreatened. The majority of their works were published as or after the escalating war cycle of 1756 to 1763 began to push Europe and European America into what Franco Venturi termed 'the crisis of the *ancien régime*'.[3] They reveal to us, nevertheless, the extent to which this *régime* believed itself to be modern.

The 'Enlightened narrative' thus delineated is intensely Latin or – a

[3] Venturi, 1979, 1984; Litchfield, 1989, 1991.

term I have sought to avoid – 'Western' in its focus and emphasis; it is concerned with the medieval and early modern histories of the successor states formed within the old Roman frontiers, before the expansion of Frankish, Norman, Flemish and Rhenish power east into Germany and Central Europe or west into Britain and the Atlantic islands. There are consequently limitations to its vision with which Scottish historians within our period, or German historians just after it, had to contend; Gibbon himself knew no German and had little sense of Germany as a zone in which history had happened or cultural change was going on. There were two senses, however, in which this 'Eurocentric' history was aware of contacts between 'Europe' and worlds beyond it. The Russian state was believed to have been Europeanised, and to have set out on the conquest of Central Asia as far as the borders of China, leading to the final subjugation of the steppe nomad peoples who had so often invaded Roman and post-Roman Europe, enlarging the meaning of the term 'barbarian' beyond its Gothic and Germanic associations. Secondly, the peoples of the Atlantic coastlands – 'Europe' in its narrowly Latin sense – had embarked on a conquest of the global ocean, leading to commercial empires in Asia, the colonisation of the Americas and the massive forced diaspora of enslaved Africans. The great Enlightened histories of these processes in world history – Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes*, Robertson's histories of America and India – lie beyond the scope of the present volume; but the processes they describe were already transforming the history of Enlightened Europe, by enlarging the controlled rivalry of France and Britain into a contest for maritime empire, and their presence is to be felt even in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*.

The 'Enlightened narrative' and its world were therefore changing by the time Gibbon's volumes began to appear in 1776; yet it is not on this account, but for reasons older in the history of western Europe's debate with itself, that the *Decline and Fall* appears exceptional, and even anomalous, in the context furnished by the present volume. On the one hand, it can easily be shown that Gibbon was intensely aware of the movement through the 'Christian millennium' to Enlightened 'Europe', and regarded it as the history in which he was himself living and writing. On the other, it will become clear that he is living in this history but choosing not to write it. Where the 'Enlightened narrative', in every case we are about to study, relates the history of the Christian millennium and the way out of it, the *Decline and Fall* is a narrative of late antiquity and the way into the Christian middle ages. It ceases in 1453 and makes no attempt to go on into the history of modernity (to use the

term 'modern' in our way, which is not Gibbon's). Furthermore, though he presupposes and at times reiterates the history of the Latin middle ages – the history of papacy and empire, French and English monarchy – he deliberately though with many misgivings chooses not to relate it, but to pursue instead the history of the eastern Constantinean monarchy to the capture of its capital by the Ottoman Turks. *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* therefore ceases to be the history of the supersession of Roman empire by Roman church – the first movement in every other Enlightened history of Europe – and becomes something else; whatever it was, something Gibbon found great difficulty in carrying to an end.

The advantage of taking the 'Enlightened narrative' as a norm is that it casts a searching light on the series of decisions which Gibbon must at various times have taken with the effect of making the *Decline and Fall* what it is. The history of these decisions was broached at certain points in *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon;*[4] it may have begun as far back as Gibbon's childhood and underwent significant developments at Lausanne and Rome in 1763–4. There ensue more than ten years during which it is difficult to trace his progress towards the condition reached in the opening pages of the *Decline and Fall*, appearing in 1776. The book here presented concludes with a section examining Gibbon's intellectual development during these years, and treating it as a series of decisions leading in directions other than those contained within the 'Enlightened narrative'. Of these the most significant is one not yet considered and perhaps not fully recognised by Gibbon himself even in 1776: the decision that there must be a history of the patristic as well as the papal church, pointing in directions Greek and Arabic rather than Latin. The reasons for this decision do not lie within Enlightenment as conventionally narrated, and this book may come little closer to them than the suggestion that Gibbon himself may have been slow to realise where they were taking him.

II

There is a second theme to be pursued in this book. It is dedicated to the memory of Arnaldo Momigliano, as its predecessor was to that of Franco Venturi; in each case with the intention of honouring the memory of a great historian by continuing the exploration of a problem

[4] *EEG*, pp. 32–3, 40–2, 123–32, 263–7, 270–4, 275–8, 283–91, 303–5.

or thesis first suggested by him. Almost half a century ago, Momigliano proposed that Gibbon's importance in the history of historiography lay in the union he effected between the erudite or antiquarian scholarship derived from the Renaissance and the philosophical historiography we think of as Enlightened.[5] The marriage was not made in heaven; in *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon* it was argued at length that Gibbon's earliest and in some ways most philosophical work, the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature* of 1762, was a philosophical defence of erudition against a philosophy he thought designed to denigrate it. As Momigliano himself and others after him enquired further into his initial hypothesis, it became increasingly clear that both philosophy and erudition required integration with a third component of the historiographic package: that is to say, with narrative, meaning in the first place the classical narrative of the exemplary actions of leading figures, derived from the Greco-Roman model as interpreted by Renaissance humanists.[6] As the enquiry proceeded, however, the character of narrative itself was seen to change. Renaissance and post-Renaissance philology began the transformation of historiography into an archaeology of past states of society and culture; and not only had the classical narrative to be read into, and interpreted in, the successive contexts which philology presented, but there arose the need of a macronarrative relating how human affairs had passed through this succession – a narrative, as it is termed below, of systemic change. Erudition was a principal actor in these successive reconstructions of past states, but they arose also from the intense controversies of the early modern period between church and church, church and state, state and society, in which each contestant sought to anchor its authority in a different image of things formerly existing; as Adam Smith remarked, it was the controversial and litigious character of modern historiography that differentiated it from ancient.[7] Philosophical historiography, meaning history written in the temper which the eighteenth century termed 'philosophical', commonly aimed to distance itself from controversy of this kind, whether by contemplating it in detachment or by reducing it to narrative of the macronarrative kind, and in all these ways narrative, erudition and philosophy interacted and changed one another's meanings. The strength of the Momiglianan formula lay in the increasing density of its texture.

The formal relations between the three components were sometimes debated, as they were in the Académie des Inscriptions, in Adam

[5] Momigliano, 1955, ch. viii. [6] Hicks, 1996. [7] Below, p. 325.

Smith's lectures at Glasgow, or in the young Gibbon's *Essai* written as a criticism of d'Alembert; but it seems that their history can best be followed through tracing the various genres of historiography as these took shape from antiquity to the early modern period, and enquiring how these genres called for various ways of writing history and understanding what it meant to write it. In this book, then, studies of the major historians preceding Gibbon are introduced by a preliminary chapter or prelude,[8] which examines the diversities of early modern historiography inherited, perhaps as a *damnosa hæreditas*, by the historians of Enlightenment, and considers how narrative, erudition and philosophy came to be elements in this inheritance. It is premised, however, that the task facing each historian was the construction of an 'Enlightened narrative', that is to say, a macronarrative of great systemic complexity, tracing what were called *les progrès de l'esprit humain* through the grand sequence of the ancient, the Christian and the philosophical; and that the construction of narrative on this scale, while a task to which philosophy may make profoundly important contributions, is never one which the philosopher as such undertakes. Hume was a philosopher who became a historian; Smith a philosopher who never converted conjectural history into fully narrative civil history; Gibbon a historian who never intended to be anything else and employed philosophy as he had need of it. Momigliano's formula implies that philosophy is one of three components of Enlightened historiography, whose history is therefore not epiphenomenal to the history of philosophy. This book asserts that its history is the history of the narratives which historians have been impelled to put together, and enquires why the *Decline and Fall* is a narrative both like and unlike those we consider its peers.

[8] An earlier and longer version may be found in Pocock, 1996.

PRELUDE

The varieties of early modern historiography

I

The writing of history, an activity which has become central to neo-Latin and post-Latin culture, was in the second half of the eighteenth century still in a pre-modern condition. This did not prevent its being an advanced literary genre and a sophisticated branch of critical enquiry; but the crucial developments that gave it its modern character had not occurred. They may be said to include the growth of a historicist philosophy that made history the condition of human life at all points; the opening of archives that made history the memory of the state and led to the belief that this memory was preserved so fully that an objective enquiry might convert it into truth; and above all, the reorganisation of academic and intellectual life which in the nineteenth century made historians the members of an accredited profession. Gibbon could claim that history was his vocation; but his problems in reconciling the status of a gentleman with that of a man of letters reveal to us that we are still dealing with a world of amateurs and virtuosi, in which established literate elites – churchmen, lawyers, humanists – co-existed and competed with leisured critics and independently operating *philosophes*. As there were a number of ways of being a historian, so there were a number of reasons for becoming one, and as a further consequence a number of meanings the term itself could bear and of intellectual activities it could connote. Though discrete, these activities were not separate; they were coming together in various patterns which defined the *métier d'historien* as it was in the era of Enlightenment; and this is the situation underlying the Momiglianan formula that historiography consisted in a number of activities – narrative, erudition, philosophy – which it was still the historian's task to combine appropriately. There were, then, several species of historiography, which had been formed in the process of singling out various subjects and ways of treating them;

and these subjects came together to define what 'history' was, and to combine the several species in what was still a highly composite genre.

Though 'history' had not become one of the recognised liberal arts, it had its own muse among the Nine and enjoyed a classical status and description. The classical meaning of 'history', which retained authority in the still neo-classical Enlightenment, was that of a narrative; one which related the exemplary deeds, to be imitated or avoided – there were bad examples as well as good – of ruling individuals, displayed in a context of war and government, politics, rhetoric and morality. This narrative might be written by the principal actor himself, but was probably better supplied by a historian who was witness to his deeds and was himself active in the nexus of performance; as a narrative of action, it should be written by one who had been active himself.[1] (Gibbon thought that, as a military historian, it was an advantage to him that he had commanded troops, a disadvantage that he had never seen action.[2]) History was therefore written in and of the present, and only its survival in written form made it a record of the past. As this came to be the case, 'the historian' existed in the past; 'the Roman' or 'the English history' came to mean the aggregate of surviving works written by those like him; and it was a question whether one who studied, edited or rewrote them in the present should be termed a 'historian' at all. When Gibbon was called 'the historian of the Roman empire', the epithet carried, first, the neo-classical connotation that he had outdone the 'historians' of the past according to canons which they and he acknowledged: second, the 'modern' connotation that 'criticism' enabled him to understand their writings, and consequently their world, better than they had themselves. This claim could be described as 'philosophical'; yet the need to make it testifies to the extraordinary authority still exercised by surviving 'narrative'.

These narratives were rhetorical exercises, pronounced for purposes of morality; it might be more important that they should exhibit moral ideals than that they should be true to the facts, yet if that were the issue how had 'the facts' come to be known? Since very early times it had been recognised that there might be more than one account of the same event, and that the historian might have to declare which he took to be true or declare the impossibility of deciding. He now ceased to appear in the role of actor or witness, and became a commentator on other men's

[1] Hicks, 1996, gives the best summary account of this genre.
[2] *Memoirs*, p. 117; *Journal A*, p. 75.

narratives; he might become a critic or a judge, but philosophers might appear and inform him that he knew nothing on the authority of his own intellect. The pyrrhonist controversy of the early eighteenth century was one to which Gibbon was still responding. This was the point, however, at which context made its appearance, as something which might be known independently of narrative and report. The exemplary deeds of the actors in Greek or Roman history were performed by political beings – citizens, rulers, magistrates, kings – existing and acting in contexts of political structure which both regulated and defined the actions they performed. These structures or polities were designed to reconcile highly competitive actions and were themselves highly contestable; they might succeed or fail in their function, and were liable to deliberate or catastrophic change. It therefore happened that the city, as well as the citizen, became a metaphorical actor in the narrative the historian related, and that history became a macronarrative recounting the changing form and fortune of the city as the framework of moral and political action. The historian now became a political analyst or theorist, and could return a different set of answers to the question how he validated the statements his narrative contained.

As history became a narrative of contexts as well as of actions, the moral and exemplary character of the actions related was affected. Ancient rulers and citizens were a warlike set of men, and war was recognised as a domain of the uncontrollable and unpredictable, in which violence occurred in a context of contingency, ruled by fortune. The narrative of action became a narrative of mystery, meaning not only the mystery of random contingency, but the mystery of how decision and action were framed in the face of contingency. Whether action had proved successful or disastrous, that which was exemplary about it was at the same time that which was arcane, formed in the depths of the human heart as it interacted with fortune. Political action, formed in the uncertain and shifting environments of political situations and contested systems, could be viewed in the same way; and at no time was this more true than when political systems disintegrated or became corrupt, so that actions which should secure one result secured another and speech came to bear other meanings than those which it seemed to convey. It was for this reason that Tacitus so often appeared to the early modern and neo-classical mind the greatest of ancient, and therefore of all, historians. He had no rival as an author of narrative at the point where the exemplary became the arcane, and to call him a 'philosophical' historian was less to say that he had rendered the arcane explicable

than that he had plumbed to their depths the moral consequences of seeing it as explicable only in part. 'Reason of state', the narrative of human action in disordered situations, was perhaps ancient historiography's chief contribution to the subsequent notion of sin, and it made this contribution at the point where it asked how far narrative could render explicable the actions which it related.

The classical narrative, still conceived as an exemplary model, retained an extraordinary authority in neo-classical culture down to the Age of Revolutions. It remained a problem for both statesmen and historians that they could not comport themselves according to the ancient model in which they acted in both roles,[3] and with the authority of ancient history there persisted the authority of the ancient model of politics, with its typical narratives of foundation and legislation, virtue and corruption. However, the classical narrative had in fact never been confined to the simple narrative of exemplary actions. It had been also a macronarrative of the foundation and decay of political forms, and part of the 'philosophical' component inherited from Tacitean historiography had been the question how, and whether, the actions of individuals could be made the occasions of moments of systemic change. The narrative of action by citizens had further been subjected to a long series of criticisms: the philosophical critique of citizenship, the Christian critique of ancient values, the monarchical critique of republican government, the critique of virtue by commerce, and most recently the Enlightened critique of monarchy, republic and Christianity all together. The classical model, and the classical narrative which was part of it, owed their extraordinary survival in the eighteenth century to the circumstance that while they were challenged by all subsequent history, they were at the same time means of criticising that history itself, so that one could not write history without entering, for the most part intentionally, into the debates between ancient and modern. A consequence for historiography was the heightening of consciousness of the many phases through which European history had passed since classical antiquity; and there was a link between history as the narrative of classical action and history as the narrative of systemic changes in civilisation. It was not narrative alone, however, that could furnish knowledge of what the phases of the systemic narrative had been.

[3] Hicks, 1996, pp. 14–22.

II

The rhetoric and canons of ancient historiography had changed slowly, and Ammianus Marcellinus does not read very differently from Polybius half a millennium before him, though the two lived in very different historical environments. A generation before Ammianus, however, Eusebius of Caesarea had started a revolution by inventing the new subject of Christian history. Divisible into sacred history and ecclesiastical history, it was intended to narrate the actions of God, to which the actions of men were at best ancillary and might be irrelevant. Sacred history exhibited the actions of God in the world, and might be the history of a divine plan of which the world's history was simply a product. Humans had, however, failed God at a number of points, and sacred history must therefore entail a strategy of redemption. The church was the vehicle of this strategy, and sacred history included ecclesiastical history; but the descent of the eternal into time had not eliminated human depravity, error or exposure to contingency, and the history of the church was therefore a history of the arcana of action like other histories. It could be written as a branch of sacred history, the church militant as the church triumphant; or it could be written as a history of human actions and passions, and for the great Christian historians the secret lay in the interplay between the two modes of the church's existence. Since these corresponded to the two natures united in Christ, the writing of church history had Christological and theological connotations; we should recall Cardinal Newman's dictum that to write a civil history of the church necessarily had Socinian consequences, since it entailed a diminution of Christ's divine as opposed to his human nature.[4] Since he had been born in the days of Caesar Augustus and had suffered under Pontius Pilate, his mission on earth, and that of the church after him, had been conducted in confrontation with the tremendous edifice of the jurisdiction of the Roman empire, and the history of the Church was seen to consist very largely of the erection of another system of jurisdiction whose authority was that of the Spirit. When this in turn came to be challenged, it was sometimes in the name of an alternative ecclesiastical jurisdiction, sometimes in the name of the civil authority as party to that jurisdiction, sometimes in the name of the Spirit held to act independently of all jurisdictions whatsoever. Each of these claims entailed a certain writing of history sacred,

[4] Young, in Womersley, 1997, p. 314.

ecclesiastical and civil; but what we have to do with under the name of Enlightenment is an attempt to make civil society paramount, irrespective of the theological consequences and at any cost to history sacred and ecclesiastical. In this enterprise the writing of civil history of an increasingly rich texture was obviously a potent instrument, aimed at the inclusion of all religious history within its schematic structures; but the sources from which it derived its richness of texture are another matter. To this richness, and therefore to the paramountcy of civil history, narrative, erudition and philosophy all contributed.

Ecclesiastical history continued – within limits beyond which civil history gave way to a sacred – to contribute to the enrichment of the historiographic vocabulary. In the area of narrative, it developed its own idioms in which the actions of churchmen might be recounted in terms extending from the hagiographic and the edifying which were its version of the exemplary, to narratives in which the actions recorded had effects on the structure of the church as a human society – interacting necessarily with the divine – and on its interactions with secular authority and civil society. Such narratives increased in complexity when – above all after the Reformation – the structure of the church and even the operations of the divine within it came to be contested, and the actions recorded had the effect and the intention of moving ecclesiastical history in one direction or in another. Churchmen themselves, notably in England but no less in all Protestant and Catholic communions, had occasion to put forward views of the church in which the civil magistrate or prince played a central if contestable role, and these generated histories in which the life of the church in time became more intricately associated with the history of civil society and modified the ways in which the latter was written. On one margin or at one extreme, it became possible to write ecclesiastical history as if it were indistinguishable from Tacitean history – a premise which the actions of churchmen often thoroughly deserved – and so by implication to extend the paramountcy of civil history over ecclesiastical. Paolo Sarpi's history of the Council of Trent – one of the neo-Tacitean masterpieces of baroque historiography – is a famous example. The epithet 'philosophical' was often conferred upon histories of this kind, and came specifically to mean historiography which assimilated everything to the civil; but we must not ignore the persistence of histories 'as well ecclesiastical as civil' – to use an English term – which endeavoured to maintain the Christian position that civil history shared a frontier with the sacred, and that the latter transcended the historiography so rapidly developing. The reception of the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* illustrates -- if with much confusion – this persistence.

The ecclesiastical role in the growth of European erudition was so large that it needs to be treated in the context of that growth as a whole. Before proceeding to this subject, we should take note of a way in which Christian historiography took part in the formation of the kind of history that would be termed 'philosophical', meaning here that it attempted a history of mankind enlarged beyond the boundaries of the sacred narrative. Sacred history was inadvertently the parent of modern anthropology, in that it differentiated sharply between those peoples – the first Israel and the second which was the church – chosen by God to act as its vehicles, and those 'gentiles' who had rejected this role or been unaware of it. By excluding the latter from a narrative in which they did not cease to be visible, sacred history raised the question of what sort of history they enjoyed, and there came to be necessary exercises in the reconciliation of the two. The science of chronology, Jewish as well as Christian in its origins, endeavoured to reconcile the Mosaic cosmogony, recounting the creation of the world and the primitive formation of mankind, with the similar schemes laid down by ancient literate cultures. These were in the first place west Eurasian – Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian – laid down by peoples visible in the biblical narratives; halfway through the second Christian millennium, however, their number was increased by the discovery of Chinese and Hindu chronologies (radically unlike one another) and by what survived of Maya and Inca systems of schematising and dating the past. These were much harder to connect with, let alone fit into, the narrative of Biblical chronology, and the hymnodist who wrote 'Thy Word, O Lord, we value more than China or Peru' knew with what he was contending. Persistent though the Noachic genealogies, tracing the posterities of Ham, Shem and Japhet, proved to be, there were peoples of great antiquity, rather recorded than unrecorded, who did not seem to belong to the sacred history of fall and salvation as so far constructed. Perhaps there would have to be a new sacred history culminating in a Christian mission to the newly discovered gentiles; but this is more a phenomenon of the Evangelical period than of the Enlightened, against which the former was a reaction. Meanwhile, it was a problem for both Christians and deists to decide whether the gentiles had a civil history, and if so, how it might be related to both sacred history and the history of the church. The history which sacred history had ignored and excluded, and which 'philosophy' was now proposing to use against it, both was

and was not a Judeo-Christian invention; but in excluding it, the historians had given a structure to that which had been there all the time.

III

The Latin middle ages, with their Augustinian promotion of sacred over civil history, were not a great period in the history of neo-Latin narrative historiography; but they were of crucial importance in the formation of the branch of historiography we term erudition. An alternative term is 'antiquarianism', which shares its meaning with 'archaeology';[5] it is striking to consider how the images of the 'antiquarian' and the 'archaeologist' have diverged, given the etymology which defines both as interested in the study of things which are ancient. Erudition also took the ancient as its subject-matter, but was associated in particular with ancient written texts. The study of antiquity, it was often pointed out, was a pursuit rather modern than ancient; this was not a mere tautology, since though there had been antiquarians in antiquity – Varro, Pausanias, Aulus Gellius – they had been few and their cultural role eccentric. Moderns, however, had inherited from antiquity a vast baggage of cultural objects – texts, inscriptions, sculptures and other sign-bearing artefacts – not all of which could be organised into the recognised genres and fields of enquiry, such as poetry, philosophy and narrative history. Erudition was that which found this unorganised inheritance fascinating by the mere fact of its existence, and the problem presented by both antiquities and the antiquarian was how they might be recognised, given that they could not be assimilated. There were always those who rejected erudition as itself a rejection of the accredited disciplines, and recommended that it should be abandoned or despised; Gibbon's *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature* attacked d'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire à l'Encyclopédie* – perhaps a little unjustly – as a recommendation of this kind. He saw 'philosophy' as a rejection of 'erudition', but his defence of the latter was itself philosophical.[6]

Down to this point, the 'antiquarian' is defined (in opposition to the 'archaeologist' as one whose curiosity has not yet been organised into any of the known disciplines; there survive from early modern writings defences of 'curiosity' in exactly this sense. Perhaps the antiquarian's remote descendant is the 'cultural historian', prepared to regard any

[5] Momigliano, 1955, ch. v. [6] *EEG*, chs. 8, 9.

surviving artefact, material or moral, as an expression of the 'culture' that generated it. Certainly, what interested him was survival; he was interested in any object surviving from antiquity; and this was in part the effect of his culture's inexhaustible respect for 'antiquity' in the Greco-Roman sense – a respect which persisted whether or not the survival could be channelled into any of the known disciplines of enquiry. As we trace 'erudition', however, through the Latin middle ages and into the centuries when these became themselves a species of antiquity, it begins to be concerned with objects of a new kind, subject to new modes of enquiry. The medieval church and kingdoms were probably less bureaucratically organised than the empires of antiquity; but their archives have survived, for the reason – one among many – that they were deposited as legal documents, accessible to the many kinds of pleaders, litigants and judges prevalent in a culture as obsessively litigious as it was clerical. Lay and ecclesiastical lords and corporations, possessors of property, rights and jurisdiction, deposited and constructed charters and other documents designed to substantiate their claims and authority. In the ecclesiastical case particularly, these became associated with other documents and artefacts, of a more hagiographic, liturgical and sacred kind, similarly designed to underwrite authority, and these became the objects of study at once erudite and disputatious. To Adam Smith, as we shall see below, it was the essential difference between ancient and modern historiography that the latter, unlike the former, reconstituted past states of authority, and constructed narratives around them, with the intention of substantiating contested claims to authority in the present.[7] 'Philosophical' history was, among other things, a means of distancing oneself from and determining disputes of this kind, of which the dispute between spiritual and social authority was the greatest.

Before we explore the character of 'philosophical' history, we must pursue that of erudition in its final efflorescence. This came about through the Renaissance expansion of what we may term, and was sometimes termed then, philology: the study of texts as organised language. The story has often been told of how humanists set out to restore the ancient languages in their classical purity, and succeeded so well as to reveal that the task was in fact impossible; the nearer one came to reconstituting Latin as Cicero might have spoken it, the clearer it became that one was not Cicero and that only an inhabitant of Cicero's world could speak the Latin as that world had shaped it. Anachronism

[7] Below, p. 325.

reared its head, and the study of classical language became a means of historical distancing and relativisation. The antiquarian became a Don Quixote of the study, intent on living as the ancient Roman he could not be, but was joined by the saner figure of the erudite philologist, who found in language the key to the vanished world in which it had been spoken, and might – as he must – answer the question what value there was in doing so. It was through philology thus operating that 'history' acquired the meaning it had never had before and has not lost since: that of an archaeology of past states of society, reconstructed by reconstituting the language in which their texts had been written. 'Histories, I know', wrote Robert Brady, 'are written after another manner';[8] how the narrative of human action was to be rewritten in the language of past actors was not immediately apparent. Meanwhile, however, the literary and archival deposits of the ancient world and medieval Europe – the historisation of classical speech having led to a reaction in favour of the greater flexibility of the barbaric vernaculars – made possible the reconstitution of a rich diversity of bygone systems. These may be arranged under the heads of *la langue, la loi et la foi*, past states of language, of law, and of ecclesiology and religion;[9] and of these Donald Kelley has singled out law – Roman civil law in particular – as replete with descriptions of past social practices, values and relationships, which historical study might identify and reconstitute.[10] Law and religion furnished between them the matrix in which were to be found embedded nearly all the forms of authority between which the Europe of the religious and civil wars conducted such bitter, persistent and pedantic debates; and the philological archaeology of the past was involved in that controversial search after authority which Smith thought distinguished modern from ancient historiography. A high point of the process – one among many – was reached when James Harrington decided that the English civil war and revolution could be understood only by situating them in a sequence of organisations of property, military power and political capacity stretching from classical antiquity through Gothic feudalism to the present.

These past states of language, law and religion – of both society and culture, perhaps even of the human mind itself as given form by its customs and its *moeurs* – were reconstituted by erudition and arranged themselves in chronological sequence. History as the archaeology of the past might seem the rival of history as the narrative of human actions; 'le

[8] Pocock, 1987a, p. 209; Hicks, 1996, ch. 4. [9] Barret-Kriegel, 1988–9, vol. I.
[10] Kelley, 1990.

vrai histoire d'un peuple', wrote La Curne de Sainte-Palaye in the mid-eighteenth century, 'consiste moins dans le récit de ce qu'il a fait que dans la peinture de ce qu'il a été'.[11] Narrative might be absorbed into context, and the synchronic history of states of being might dominate the diachronic history of action. At this point, however, organised structures within which actions were performed and narratives related re-asserted themselves and demanded narratives of a higher kind. The histories of England or France, of Europe or even the church, which continued to be written, were histories of complex institutions, societies or imagined communities, held to have existed through many centuries and passed through a diversity of the states of being which erudites and controversialists reconstituted. Their histories could not be written – and the contested foundations of their authority in the present could not be debated – unless the changing conditions in the past of the *langue, loi* and *foi* composing them were depicted; but the fact that each of these entities was a continuously existing and changing theatre of political and religious action and experience compelled its history to be written in narrative form. The archaeology of the past thus gave birth to a macronarrative, reciting how England, or Europe, or civil society itself had passed through successive states of being, and how each of these states had changed into, or been replaced by, its successor. It was perhaps the hardest of historiographical problems to solve, or of narratives to construct; each historian surveyed in this book was engrossed in explaining how classical society had given way to ecclesiastical and ecclesiastical to commercial; but European historiography was well acquainted with the writing of macronarratives, or narratives of systemic change, by the time of the advent of the kind of history we term 'philosophical'.

IV

In assessing this kind of history, we are of course dealing with Enlightenment; a term which, it was argued in the preceding volume, has sometimes been too much homogenised and reified, so that we are tempted to write as if 'the Enlightenment' applied a coherent 'philosophy' to 'history'. In reality, the term 'philosophy' was used in a number of ways, not all of which entailed coherent systems of thinking, and which impinged upon historiography from a number of directions. It is

[11] Gossman, 1968, p. 169.

more immediately important to this study, however, that the notions of 'history' and 'historiography' were also far from being unified; the whole thrust of Momigliano's argument has been to show that several genres of study and writing converged to make 'history' what it was, and that this convergence was by no means complete when Gibbon began to write. As a boy he read ancient history and ecclesiastical history, with momentous but non-identical consequences. In his Lausanne exile he engaged in erudite study, but drew on Giannone, Montesquieu and Voltaire for the information he learned to criticise. On his return to England he completed a philosophical defence of erudition against the attacks of philosophers, and during his militia service began to consider himself a historian and look for the subject of a history he desired to write. In his second Lausanne sojourn he immersed himself in the study of antiquities, but during his journey to Rome began to conceive a massive history which took further shape over the next twelve years. There is much more to this story than 'philosophy' reflecting upon 'history' and, in deciding what 'philosophical history' means when the term is applied to Gibbon, we must keep in mind the diversity of meanings which both root words could bear. It is implicit in Momigliano's thesis that 'philosophy', though it profoundly affected the other activities constituting historiography, did not necessarily replace or even dominate them; and this, furthermore, is what Gibbon was attempting to say in his *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*. In this pluralised setting, let us proceed to enquire what 'philosophy' meant, and how its various meanings had consequences for the activities constituting 'history'.

We may begin by recalling that 'philosophy', as the term was used towards the end of the seventeenth century, did not always indicate a body of systematic thought about nature and knowledge. It was often said to denote a method rather than a system, and this was not all. It could indicate no more than a civil attitude of mind, an openness to reason, a desire to control the passions of which fanaticism was one; but in this apparently eirenic sense, it became the basis of a militant programme and ideology. Locke, Shaftesbury and Addison shared the declared objective of removing 'philosophy' from the schools, where it was the matter of disputation conducted by clerics, and locating it in coffee-houses, clubs and drawing-rooms, where it would become the matter of conversation among the members (just possibly not excluding women) of a leisured and polite gentry. In this conjunction of 'philosophy' and 'politeness', we encounter the Enlightened objective of severing the former from theology, in which alliance it had proved capable of

disrupting civil government and society, and reducing both philosophy and religion to a sociable activity, a conversation between social beings who could never think or act outside society. The programme of 'politeness' was deeply and comprehensively anti-clerical; it was also anti-scholastic, anti-sectarian and anti-ecclesiastical. A 'philosophy' which could never be other than sociable could never be the ally of the religious beliefs and claims to spiritual authority seen as the causes of seventeenth-century anarchy. This preoccupation with popery and fanaticism, with ecclesiastical authority and religious warfare, is so far recurrent in all the phenomena we term Enlightened that it may be used in organising and explaining them.

This change in the meaning of 'philosophy' had several consequences for historiography. It led to a general indictment of 'ancient' philosophy, and a historical narrative in which magi, brahmins, perhaps Egyptian priests, and above all Pythagoreans and Platonists after them, had devised a false philosophy of essential being and spiritual substance which Protestant thought as it moved towards Socinianism, and deism and scepticism after that movement was complete, desired to repudiate as the foundation of the insoluble riddles of Nicene and Trinitarian theology. Scholasticism had been the last phase of this long history, and had been succeeded by a 'modern' philosophy, the work of Bacon and Grotius, Locke and Newton, in which the human mind knew its own business and deduced God and his attributes from the observed movements of bodies and the laws of social morality. The word 'philosophical' might by itself suffice to indicate this move towards a latitudinarian Christianity, whatever its consequences for theology. The historical narrative it entailed had been foreshadowed by Thomas Hobbes and worked out in enormous detail and brilliant insight in the huge volumes of Johann Jakob Brucker, the first great historian of philosophy.[12] That pursuit had thus acquired a history of systemic change and transformation, to be added to the grand narratives already existing.

The reduction of philosophy and theology from perception of reality to sociable discourse (subject to the disciplines of politeness) formed part of what may very well have been the greatest change wrought by Enlightenment in the field of social and historical thought: the perception of society as the movement towards 'manners' or *moeurs*. This keyword denoted a complex of shared practices and values, which secured the individual as social being and furnished the society sur-

[12] Brucker, 1742–4.

rounding him with an indefinitely complex and flexible texture; more powerfully even than laws, manners rendered civil society capable of absorbing and controlling human action and belief, even when grounded in the allegedly immediate experience of divine presence. Manners appeared already furnished with a complex history, since a series of dramatic changes occurring at the end of the seventeenth century in the military and financial organisation of several western states had produced a widespread conviction that what was beginning to be called 'Europe' (rather than 'Christendom') had entered a condition called 'commercial society', in which political and social life were conducted otherwise than in any recorded past. Commercial society, characterised by the incessant exchange of goods and services, moral and material, between its members, was that in which 'manners' and 'politeness' could reign undisturbed, and philosophy was perceived as the sociable conversation which Enlightenment sought to make it. Only in such a society, it began to be argued, was 'philosophy' possible, meaning by that term the antidote to metaphysical fanaticism; and this formed the basis of a striking series of contrasts with the 'manners' and 'philosophy' of either classical antiquity or the 'Christian millennium'. There began to emerge one of the two great themes of the Enlightened macronarrative.

What in succeeding chapters we shall call 'the Enlightened narrative' recounted the descent from classical antiquity into the darkness of 'barbarism and religion', and the emergence from the latter set of conditions of a 'Europe' in which civil society could defend itself against disruption by either. This history had two themes: the emergence of a system of sovereign states – multiple monarchies, confederacies and republics – in which the ruling authority was competent to maintain civil government and conduct an independent *Aussenpolitik*; and the emergence of a shared civilisation of manners and commerce, through which, in addition to treaties and statecraft, the independent states could be thought to constitute a confederation or republic. This ideal condition, or the possibility of it, had replaced the universal monarchies, papacies, empires and feudal disorders of the European past, and the Enlightened narrative related both the history of the descent into 'barbarism and religion' and the escape from it. The narrative of state, it may cautiously be suggested, was written by combining the often Tacitean narrative of the statecraft of rulers with the macronarrative of how the past states of feudal, royal and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, uncovered by the archaeology of erudition, had competed with one another. The

narrative of manners was constructed by combining past states of language and culture, similarly brought to light, with the premise that 'philosophy', 'politeness' and 'commerce' defined the condition at which Europe might be arriving in an age to which the metaphor of light was increasingly applied. The two narratives combined to produce the macronarrative of 'philosophical history' – 'philosophy' denoting both the condition at which history was arriving and the state of mind in which it should be written and understood.

So far, then, we have been following the eighteenth-century use of 'philosophy' to denote a temper of mind rather than a system of thought; a temper which accepted and promoted the socialisation and secularisation of thinking and debate as an activity appropriate to civil society. It is so often important to follow this usage in understanding Enlightened discourse that we must resist the temptation to regard it as a mere prelude to more systematic thinking. However, the historical narrative leading from ancient philosophy to modern necessarily called for philosophers and philosophical systems visible at its close, and this need could of course be met. Locke comes into view here, and we may summarise his contribution to an Enlightened 'philosophy' of 'history' – the two words are not easily brought into conjunction – by saying that his proposal that the mind was limited to thinking about the ideas which it formed of objects led to the supposition that what appeared before it was less the vision of objective reality than it was the mental world constructed by the mind itself. In all his theological odyssey, wrote Gibbon, Chillingworth had been his own convert.[13] An age deeply interested in opinions, manners and customs as the foundation of political and religious systems readily moved to the supposition that these systems too were products of the human mind – of what Gibbon in the *Essai* called 'l'art'[14] and Enlightened discourse frequently called 'les progrès de l'esprit humain'. In a sense, then, there was little to be studied beyond the workings of the mind itself; but on the premise, central to Enlightenment, that humans were inherently social and sociable, the dimension of society, although produced by the mind, had to be studied as part of the process by which it was produced. And society, we have already seen, had been differentiated into systems, legal, religious, linguistic and so forth, endowed with historical existence and its limitations by erudition functioning as the archaeology of the past.

Here historical knowledge, as it existed in various forms at the end of

[13] *Memoirs*, p. 63. [14] *MW*, IV, pp. 23–34.

the seventeenth century, encountered philosophical challenge for the first time in 'modern' history: the important challenge which we know as 'pyrrhonism'.[15] Cartesian in much of its origin, this pointed out to the historian or the antiquary that he had no knowledge founded on objects of which he had formed ideas, but was dependent on information supplied to him by others; his knowledge was second-hand, and the best he could do was to assess the credibility or the authority of his informants. It was characteristic of philosophy, in this age as in others, that it exalted objects above information. To this challenge there were developed two responses. The erudite – it helps to think of them as led by Dom Mabillon[16] – discovered means, collectively known as *la critique*, of interpreting documents, inscriptions and monuments as sources of information; of assessing their authenticity and authority, and of extracting from them information far exceeding what their authors had intended to convey – thus transcending the charge of reliance on second-hand knowledge. The French and English debates between 'ancients' and 'moderns' were powerfully affected by this argument on behalf of the latter.[17] This development was recognised as of great importance by 'philosophy' in the broader, looser sense of the term; but so powerful was the presupposition that 'philosophy' dealt with knowledge as that of objects, that as the disciplines took shape criticism found itself relegated from the department of philosophy to that of literature. Jurisprudence, it has been powerfully argued, knew better.[18]

Philosophers in the strict sense responded to the pyrrhonist challenge by arguing that the mind's knowledge of itself, of its workings and therefore of its products, was knowledge of nature – that there existed a human nature, part of the natural world, of which there was possible a knowledge authenticated by nature itself. This move was enormously reinforced by the practice of organising all information regarding human society, culture and morality under the rubric of 'natural law', in which were made evident both the unchanging principles of human nature and the local and temporary organisations of society derived from these principles. Knowledge so organised was philosophical and scientific, and historical knowledge was assimilated to philosophy; indeed, a 'philosophical' view of history might be said to be one which organised historical knowledge in this way. There has come to exist a meta-history of both Enlightenment and European historiography

[15] The subject of pyrrhonism is larger than its attack on history; Popkin, 1979.
[16] Bloch, 1952, pp. 34–41; Barret-Kriegel, 1988–9, vol. 1. [17] Levine, 1991.
[18] Kelley, 1990.

which reduces all relevant phenomena to a narrative of movement from an Enlightened naturalism, securely established in the 'heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers',[19] to a romantic and largely east European historicism which made all such phenomena incidents in a history quite differently perceived.[20] This movement certainly occurred, and we can trace it in the texts which effected it; but there are reasons why it does not seem entirely satisfactory as an account of the practice of eighteenth-century historians. These reasons may be found if we re-examine the relationships between narrative, erudition and philosophy.

The critique of d'Alembert with which Gibbon's authorial life began was directed against a supposed tendency among *philosophes* to prefer a natural history of the human mind to a civil, and to prefer the faculties by which the mind recognised itself and the natural order of its workings to those by which it pursued the confused, paradoxical and often deeply discouraging record of its products and activities in the history of which it had left records. To say that d'Alembert preferred an ideal history to an actual would be unjust to an *Encyclopédiste*, given that compilation's deep interest in material and artisanal culture; but he was aware of the tension between the two, and sufficiently ambivalent about it to open himself to Gibbon's charge that a single faculty of the mind was once again seeking hegemony over the others. There were indeed points at which d'Alembert, like Voltaire, wrote as if he were introducing a new kind of history, constructed on philosophic principles and designed to replace its un-Enlightened precursors. The defence of erudition that Gibbon sought to construct in the *Essai* was a defence of civil history against natural; a defence of 'the imagination and the judgment' that rendered intelligible and sympathetic what Kant (and Isaiah Berlin) were to call 'the crooked timber of humanity'[21] – the dense, enigmatic and in the Tacitean sense arcane texture of human conduct in the contexts of actual history. He conducted this defence as a defence of erudition, the critical study of the *inscriptions et belles lettres* surviving from the past, but it was also a defence of narrative, the Tacitean (and philosophical) pursuit of the arcana of human behaviour. Narrative is at issue when in the *Essai* we find praise of irony, the moral and intellectual satisfaction of observing humans acting in ways other than those we expect to find guiding them. The unchanging principles of human nature, target of all historicist criticisms of Enlightened historiography – to which Gibbon in the *Decline and Fall* resorted when he found them of

[19] Becker, 1932. [20] Meinecke, 1972b; Berlin, 1976, 1979. [21] Berlin, 1990.

explanatory value – were, to Hume as well as Gibbon, benchmarks from which to assess the inexhaustible and often counter-rational diversity of human behaviour as displayed in its actions, institutions and belief-systems. Narrative and erudition followed human nature through the looking-glass, into the crooked timber of humanity. This is why, for all the *Essai*'s Montesquieuan praise of history as the science of causes and effects, there cannot be found, as some have contended, any moment at which Gibbon was a disciple engaged in a *philosophe* attempt to reduce history to the operation of general laws producing predictable consequences; he did not need to depart from this position, since he never adopted it. There may also be found, in the *Essai*'s mistrust of the hegemony of philosophy over history, anticipations of his instantly Burkean response to news of the French Revolution. The philosophic temper had always implied a hostility to philosophers, if they placed themselves above society; and the crooked timber might either resist revolutionary re-ordering, or pervert it. The philosophic temper came to consist in knowing such things as this.

The analysis just conducted of Gibbon's first essay in philosophic history may serve as prelude to the chapters which are to follow. Erudition may be schematised as the crucial link between narrative and philosophy, since it established the contexts in which narratives must be seen as proceeding, and reminded philosophy of the ineradicable particularity of both context and individual action; philosophy was thus constantly obliged to choose between the impulse to socialise thought and the impulse to rethink society. Philosophy again – a word of diverse meanings – supplied historiography with the new and momentous macronarrative with which this book is principally concerned: the 'Enlightened narrative', which followed the Latin provinces from the decline and fall of the Roman empire, through the Christian millennium of barbarism and religion, papacy and empire, into the emerging Europe of states and manners, commerce and Enlightenment. But if philosophy indicated and did much to construct this grand narrative, it was not philosophy alone, in any of its senses, that narrated it; and the moment has come to ask whether narrative is ever the business of the philosopher. The 'Enlightened narrative' was in fact a complex of many narratives, variously crooked in their timber: what we are calling macronarratives, tracing the succession of states of legal, religious, political and (with the advent of 'manners') cultural organisation, established by erudition as the archaeology of the past; narratives of individual and usually elite conduct, in which the exemplary gave way to the arcane as

Tacitean historiography traced actors through changing political and moral situations. These narratives had been supplied by ancients and moderns, laymen and churchmen, humanists, jurists, ecclesiastics and most recently philosophers; and the task of the Enlightened historian was to combine them as best he could at new levels of macronarrative. The term 'philosophy' could denote the temper in which he recognised this task and set about it, and perhaps this is why David Hume is a central figure in this book, as the only major philosopher who has ever been a major narrative historian (as distinct from yet another philosopher of history). Philosophy in the eighteenth-century sense deeply affected the writing of history, but did not replace, while it added itself to, other ways of writing it which were growing and changing in their own ways. Momigliano's proposition that Gibbon effected new marriages between erudition and philosophical history remains valid in the context of Gibbon's youthful dictum that the faculties of the mind engaged in scholarship must work together as equals, and sometimes as competitors. Their relationships took effect in the construction of grand narratives, and the key to each major historian is the composition of the narrative he put together.

PUC-RIO

PART I

Constructing the Enlightened narrative

SECTION I

Giannone: jurist and *libertin* in the central Mediterranean

CHAPTER I

Civil and ecclesiastical history

In considering the major Enlightened histories surveyed in the following chapters, attention must be paid in each case to the construction of a grand narrative, since that was a principal concern of each author. Giannone's history of Naples is a history of competing and changing jurisdictions, that assumed by the Church of Rome in interaction with those successively constituting the province and then the kingdom of Naples. It is somewhat more a history of law, and somewhat less a history of manners, than was to be characteristic of histories written by *philosophes*; but the underlying theme of this *istoria civile* is that of the 'Enlightened narrative' – the struggle between ecclesiastical authority and civil society. The stages through which Giannone's narrative proceeds, however, are not very different from those pursued in the English ecclesiastical histories of Gibbon's boyhood reading: Laurence Echard and his continuator, and William Howel, for whom Gibbon retained a real respect.[1] They too dealt with republic and principate, heathen and Christian empire, primitive, patristic and papal church; they understood that ecclesiastical and civil authority were differently constructed and called for different historical narratives; they faced as a consequence the difficulty of co-ordinating the history of the imperial East with that of the barbaric, feudal and above all papal West. The foundations of macronarrative were laid by the disputes of Christian and Latin Europe; and it is a consequence that what we call philosophical or Enlightened historiography may consist in a particular way of contemplating this sequence of systems, but is not the sole or the principal author of the sequence it contemplates. As we study the historiography

[1] *EEG*, pp. 29–42.

of Enlightenment, therefore, we must bear in mind that its narrative structure is not very different from that of the historiography it sometimes claimed to replace. This is important when we begin by considering Giannone's work, early recognised by Gibbon, which may occupy an intermediate status in the growth of Enlightened historiography.

Pietro Giannone's *Istoria civile del regno di Napoli* had been published in that city in 1723. Gibbon studied it, rather intensively, during his first sojourn at Lausanne,[2] in French translation – his knowledge of Italian developed later – and all his life regarded it as in some measure a French work. If his first mention of Giannone in the *Decline and Fall* includes the words 'an Italian lawyer who dreaded the power of the church', he later describes him as 'a disciple of the Gallican school',[3] and these two judgments contain the reasons why the *Istoria civile* is not to be regarded as a work of *philosophe* character. A debate has gone on among modern Italian historians as to whether Giannone is a representative *dei lumi* or only *dei libertini*, and this chapter will lean towards the latter opinion. There is an intersecting debate as to the place in history of a phenomenon known as 'the Neapolitan Enlightenment'; Giannone did not use the term, but his text contains allusions to the discussions among Neapolitan intellectuals which it partly indicates. Both his life and his allusions, however, belong to those years of Neapolitan history in which Habsburg domination ceased to be Spanish and in its last phase became Austrian; the *Istoria civile* is dedicated to the Emperor Charles VI. This phase of Enlightenment, Cartesian rather than Newtonian, is not included in the great work of Franco Venturi, who considers the *settecento riformatore* in Naples only from the Bourbon accession of 1734.[4] It is further complicated in modern eyes by the disturbing presence of Giambattista Vico, whose *Scienza nuova* was first published in 1725. Of this extraordinary masterpiece Gibbon seems to have been as unaware as were so many intellects of his age and century, and it could figure in a study of the *Decline and Fall* only as a gigantic antithesis, belonging to the world of what might have been rather than of what was. The paths which Gibbon did not follow, studied in these volumes, are confined to those which he knew of yet did not take.

The question of a 'Neapolitan Enlightenment' is therefore somewhat

[2] His readings are set out by Craddock, *YEG*, pp. 68–72. They are mainly 'erudite' in character; i.e., concerned with points of criticism and verification. See further Robertson, 1997a, pp. 3–9.

[3] *Decline and Fall*, vol. II, ch. 20, n. 111; vol. V, ch. 49, n. 30; Womersley, I, p. 759, III, p. 98; Bury, II, p. 342; V, p. 275.

[4] For discussion of Venturi's strategy see Robertson, 1992, pp. 183–206, esp. pp. 187, 196–7. For Venturi's judgments on Giannone see Venturi, 1969, pp. 24–5, 32–4.

distant from a study of Gibbon. If Giannone is not the only Neapolitan author to whom he made reference, he does not seem aware of Naples as a centre of debate with a life of its own, and as we have seen he thought of the *Istoria civile* almost as an adjunct to the discourse of French Gallicanism – a perception not indeed without some substance to it. But the importance of Giannone's history to the *Decline and Fall* is not thereby diminished. The provinces south of Rome are of cardinal importance to Gibbon's understanding of the end of the western empire, to the growing dialectic between civil and ecclesiastical power, and to the origins of and the contests between the medieval empire and papacy. The *Decline and Fall* is preponderantly a survey of late antique and medieval history; the *Istoria civile*, less global in its scope, covers the same periods and ventures beyond them into the two centuries after 1453. The two great works share the theme of the substitution of papacy for empire and – in the *Decline and Fall* only by anticipation – of the European states system for papacy and empire alike. Reading the *Istoria civile* (as the *Histoire civile*) in his early Lausanne years, Gibbon was reinforcing the perspective which had first attracted him as a boy at Stourhead, and he remembered the experience in his *Memoirs*.[5]

In stating the relationship in these terms, we return to Gibbon's judgment that Giannone 'was an Italian lawyer who dreaded the power of the church', and begin to apprehend the reasons why he did not wholly belong to the world of the *philosophes*. He was a jurist first and a philosopher second; whereas in the *Encyclopédie* the study of the mind is emancipating itself from natural jurisprudence, to the no small dismay of its more conservatively enlightened readers.[6] In the *Istoria civile*, as it has become a commonplace among its students to observe, the term *civile* is interchangeable with the term *giurisprudenziale*, and only in the last volume are there signs of that transfer of attention from laws to manners which was to help transform 'civil' history into 'philosophical'. Giannone is primarily a master of what Italian historians term *giurisdizionalismo*, the affirmation of the autonomy of civil from ecclesiastical jurisdiction; he ventures into heterodox philosophy – itself *tam antiqua quam nova* – when he offers reasons why the church should not exercise civil magistracy at all. The *Istoria civile* is first, and nearly but not quite last, a history of civil jurisdiction in what became, quite late in the story, the *regno di Napoli*, and of the long, losing but never finally lost battle which it has fought against the encroaching jurisdiction of the papacy.

[5] *Memoirs*, p. 79: 'I observed with a critical eye the progress and abuse of Sacerdotal power, and the Revolutions of [Rome and] Italy in the darker ages.' [6] Velema, 1993.

Giannone never ceases to be a jurist, which is why he never fully becomes a *philosophe*.

French Gallican historians, whether jurists or ecclesiastics, far more confident of victory in their own battles, would read Giannone with sympathy, and Giannone read them with an envy he did not attempt to conceal. An English Protestant – doubtful though it may be whether Gibbon was one such during his first years in Lausanne – would read Giannone much as his forebears had read Paolo Sarpi: as a Catholic historian engaged in the emancipation of civil jurisdiction from papal, of the national church of his *patria* from Roman usurpation; as one whose theological errors might be disregarded as he pursued this overriding objective. It was this perception which had attracted Anglicans to Gallicans – sometimes a little too closely for comfort – since at latest the days of James I, and the Enlightened mind had inherited it from the baroque. Such a reader, furthermore, might find interesting differences between Giannone's understanding of the historic autonomy of civil jurisdiction in the *regno di Napoli* and his own understanding of the autonomy it possessed in England.

In his *Introduzione* Giannone – making the humanist's usual claim to originality – announces that his history of Naples will emphasise neither the battles which have made the kingdom miserable, nor the beauty and fertility which have made it fortunate, nor the splendid buildings which have made it renowned.[7] The ensuing four volumes will in fact say much about all these things, but they will as he says be kept subordinate to the history of the civil laws, Roman, Greek, Gothic, Lombard, Norman, Suabian and Angevin, which not only constitute the history of the kingdom but have made it a kingdom as late as the Norman period – to say nothing at present of its division into two kingdoms in the times of the Angevins and Aragonese. These laws, he continues, have been in constant and varying relations with 'la Politia Ecclesiastica in esso introdotta', and have given rise, under the forms of rule to which the provinces and the kingdom have successively been subject, to the true subject of his history:

l'Accademi, i Tribunali, i Magistrati, i Giureconsulti, le Signorie, gli Uffici, gli Ordini; in brieve, tutto ciò, che alla forma del suo governo, così Politico, e Temporale, come Ecclesiastico, e Spiritual s'appartiene.[8]

[7] *Ist. civ.*, I, 'Introduzione', fo. b. [8] *Ibid.*

[the Academies, Tribunals, Magistrates, Lawyers, Seignories, Officers and Orders; in short, all that belongs to the Form of its Government, as well Political and Temporal, as Ecclesiastical and Spiritual.][9]

Our English reader would note that this was to be a history 'as well ecclesiastical as civil', like those currently being written of his own nation by Tyrrell, White Kennett or Echard;[10] but these proceeded on the assumption that England had from its beginnings been an 'empire' containing within itself all jurisdiction both temporal and spiritual, which a usurping papacy might menace from outside but could penetrate only in times of domestic conflict, when the realm 'itself did help to wound itself'. Giannone, he would discover as he read on, could make no such assumption. The civil laws installed in the southern provinces by the Romans were indeed older than the papacy, but since Norman if not Lombard times their history had been unintelligible apart from that of the ecclesiastical jurisdictions which had grown along with them and incessantly penetrated them. The history of England might be that of resistance to the papal usurpation; the history of Naples was the history of that usurpation and of responses to it, more or less unsuccessful.

Furthermore, the English reader would find Giannone continuing, the civil as distinct from the ecclesiastical history of Naples was not that of an empire containing the sources of its *imperium*, but that of a province or collection of provinces subject to an empire of which it was part. He would find, and Giannone may have intended, unmistakable allusions to the English and British situation in the way in which the *Istoria* puts this point and explains in what sense it will be *Civile*.

Se questo Reame fosse surto, come un Isola in mezzo all'Oceano, spiccato, e diviso da tutto il resto del Mondo, non s'avrebbe avuta gran pena a sostenere, per compor di sua civile Istoria molti libri; imperciocchè sarebbe bastato aver ragione de' Principi, che lo dominarono, e delle sue proprie leggi, ed instituti, co'quali fu governato. Ma poichè fu egli quasi sempre soggetto, e parte, o d'un grand' Imperio, come fu il Romano, a dapoi il Greco, o d'un gran Regno, come fu quella d'Italia sotto i Goti, e sotto i Longobardi, a finalmente ad altri Principi sottoposto, che tenendo collocata altrove la regia lor sede, quindi per mezzo de'loro Ministri'l reggevano; non dovrà imputarsi, se non a dura necessità, che per ben'intendere la sua spezial Politia, si dia un saggio della forma, e disposizione dell'Imperio Romano, e come si regessero le sue Provincie, fra le quali le

[9] Ogilvie, I, p. i. Gibbon does not mention this translation, and his library catalogue contains neither it nor the French translation which he did use. An Edward Gibbon – II? – was among the subscribers to Ogilvie's translation, many of whom were Scottish and may have been Jacobite. See Trevor-Roper, 1996. [10] Okie, 1991, ch. II.

più degne, ch'ebbe in Italia, furon certamente queste, che compongono oggi il nostro Regno. Non ben potrebbe comprender s'il loro cambiamento, se insieme non si manifestassero le cagioni più generali, onde variandosi il tutto, venisse anche questa parte a mutarsi, e poichè queste regioni, per le lor nobili prerogative invitarono molti Principi d'Europa a conquistarle, furon perciò lungamente combattute, ciascheduno pretendendo avervi diritto, a chi come Tributarie, chi in protezione, e qual finalmente come Feudatarie le pretese: si à riputato perciò pregio dell'opera, che i fonti di tutte queste pretensioni si scovrissero; nè potevano altramente mostrarsi, se non col dare una general idea, e contezza dello stato d'Italia in vari tempi, e sovente degli altri Principati più remoti, e de'trasportamenti de'Reami de gente in gente, onde sursero le tante pretensioni, che diedon moto all'imprese, e fomento.[11]

[If this Kingdom had started up, as an Island in the midst of the Ocean, separated and divided from all the rest of the World, we should not have had the Trouble of writing so many Books in order to compose its Civil History; forasmuch as it would have been sufficient to have known the Rights of the Princes who govern'd it, and their own Laws and Institutions, by which it was govern'd: But seeing it hath almost always been subject, either to a vast Empire, as was that of the Romans, and afterwards to the Greek; or to a great Kingdom, as that of Italy under the Goths and Longobards; or at last, to other Princes, who having their Royal Seats plac'd elsewhere, from whence they govern'd it by their Ministers, it ought to be imputed to cruel Necessity only, that in order to the right understanding its peculiar Polity, we are oblig'd to give a Hint of the Form and Disposition of the Roman Empire, and after what manner its Provinces were govern'd, amongst which, the most considerable that it had in Italy, were certainly these of which our Kingdom is compos'd. We should not be able to comprehend their Revolutions, if at the same Time we did not shew the more general Causes, whereby the whole being chang'd, this Part likewise came to be altered; and seeing these Provinces, on account of their noble Advantages, invited many Princes of Europe to conquer them, therefore they were long disputed, every one pretending Right to them, some as tributary, others to have the Protection of them, and, in fine, some as Feudatory: Therefore we thought it worth the while to discover the Springs of all these Pretensions; neither could they be otherwise made clear, but by giving a general Idea and Relation of the State of Italy at different Times, and often of other remote Principalities, and of the transferring of Kingdoms from one People to another, from whence arose the numerous Pretensions which set a going and encourag'd the Undertakings.][12]

Because the history of southern Italy is not autonomous, it cannot be told in its own self-generated terms, but must be written as part of a more universal history – Roman, Italian, European (and in the Spanish period, global) – responding to universal causes. This will be in part a history of jurisprudence, in part a history of *ragione di stato*. Broader

[11] *Ist. civ.*, I, ff. b–b verso. [12] Ogilvie, I, pp. i–ii.

patterns of cultural change are perhaps hinted at in the last sentence, where the phrase 'de gente in gente' may evoke the invasions and the subsequent civilisation of the barbarians; but it is hard to claim that Giannone intends to explore those deeper changes in manners, economy and religion which became the matter of philosophic history. It was to be Scottish historians in particular whom a sense of provinciality rendered philosophic and led to the investigation of universal causes. The English, who took their kingdom to be insular and self-sufficient – *divisos ab orbe Britannos* – encountered difficulty before and after Gibbon in writing philosophical history at all.

Giannone's language clearly hints at the Virgilian tag just quoted, and when he says that what is needed is a history of Roman law in the full diversity it took on in provincial and national contexts, he finds it remarkable that

Un uom di Bretagna, e dal Mondo diviso, reputando gli altri in troppo brevi chiostri aver ristretto l'ardire del'ingegno umano, mostrò d'aver coraggio per tant'impresa.[13]

[A Briton, separated from the rest of the World, thinking that others had confin'd the Reach of human Understanding to too narrow a Compass, shew'd that he had Courage enough for so great an Undertaking.][14]

This is the English civilian Arthur Duck, whose *De usu et authoritate juris civilis Romani in dominiis principum Christianorum* had first been published in 1653; but Giannone thinks his heroic endeavour proved the task beyond any one scholar, so that we must turn to specialised studies of civil law in France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain written by jurists of those nations. None such has yet been attempted in the kingdom of Naples, where in addition to the modification of Roman by barbarian laws, we have to take account of the peculiar pressures exerted by ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This in turn is not a single or a simple matter. The history of the papacy is as contingent as that of secular authority:

. . . non minori furon le contese fra'Principi del Secolo, che fra' maggiori Prelati della Chiesa. Fu anche questo Regno combattuto da'due più celebri Patriarchi del Mondo, da quel di Roma in Occidente, e dall'altro di Costantinopoli in Oriente. Per tutte le ragioni apparteneva il governo delle nostre Chiese al Pontefice Romano, non pur come Capo della Chiesa Universale, ma anche come Patriarca d'Occidente, eziandio se l'autorita sua Patriarcale avesse voluto restringersi alle sole Citta *Suburbicarie*; ma il Costantinopolitano con temerario ardire attentò usurpare le costui regioni: pretese molte Chiese di questo Reame al suo Patriarcato d'Oriente appartenersi: che di lui fosse il diritto di erger le

[13] *Ist. civ.*, I, fo. b. [14] Ogilvie, I, p. iii.

Città in Metropoli, e d'assegnar loro que' Vescovi suffraganei, che gli fossero piaciuti. Era perciò di mestiere far vedere, come questi due Patriarcati dilatassero pian piano i loro confini: il che non potea ben farsi senza una general contezza della Politia dello stato Ecclesiastico, e della disposizione delle sue Diocesi, e Provincie.[15]

[. . . forasmuch as the Disputes were no less among Secular Princes, than among the greatest Prelates of the Church. This Kingdom was also contended for by the two most famous Patriarchs of the world, the one of Rome in the West, and the other of Constantinople in the East. By all Right the Government of our Churches belong'd to the Roman Pontiff, not only as Head of the Universal Church, but likewise as Patriarch of the West, even altho' his Patriarchal Authority had been confin'd to the Suburbicarian Cities only; but the Patriarch of Constantinople, with a rash Boldness, attempted to usurp his Right. He pretended, that many Churches of this Kingdom belong'd to his Patriarchate of the East; that it was his Right to erect Cities into Metropolis's, and to assign them what Suffragan Bishops he thought fit: Therefore it was necessary to shew, how these two Patriarchates by degrees have extended their Bounds; which cannot well be done without a general Knowledge of the Polity of the Ecclesiastical State, and of the Disposition of its Diocesses and Provinces.][16]

Behind Giannone's formal acknowledgement of the Pope's supremacy lie both an interpretation of Italian history as part of the emancipation of the western provinces from the eastern empire, and an implicit acceptance of the thesis that Rome inherited St Peter's primacy among the apostles. But this is relegated from the historical to the spiritual realm by the emphasis accorded the counter-thesis of a contest for jurisdiction between two Patriarchs, each deriving his authority from his city's role in the Roman imperial structure. Gallican and Anglican apologists (to say nothing of Venetian) had argued this interpretation, thus situating the history of ecclesiastical authority within that of secular jurisdiction. 'La Chiesa è nella Repubblica, non la Repubblica nella Chiesa', Giannone wrote elsewhere;[17] but here he goes on to contend that this state of affairs has been reversed, in a great revolution which is none the less historical and political, rather than spiritual.

L'Istoria civile, secondo il presente sistema del Mondo Cattolico, non può certamente andar disgiunta dall'Istoria Ecclesiastica. Lo stato Ecclesiastico, gareggiando il Politico, e Temporale de' Principi, si è per mezzo de' suoi regolamenti, così forte stabilito nell'Imperio, e contanto in quello radicato, e congiunto, che ora non possono perfettamente ravvisarsi li cambiamenti

[15] *Ist. civ.*, I, fo. b verso. [16] Ogilvie, I, p. ii. [17] *Ist. civ.*, I, p. 49 (book I, final chapter).

dell'uno, senza la cognizione dell'altro. Quindi era necessario vedere, come, e quando si fosse l'Ecclesiastico introdotto nell'Imperio, e che di nuovo arrecasse in questo Reame: il che di vero fu una delle più grandi occasioni del cambiamento del suo stato Politico, e Temporale; e quindi non senza stupore scorgerassi, come, contro a tutte le leggi del Governo, abbia potuto un'imperio nell'altro stabilirsi, e come sovente il Sacerdozio abusando la divozion de'Popoli, e'l suo potere spirituale, intraprendesse sopra il governo temporale di questo Reame: che fu rampollo delle tante controversie Giurisdizionali, delle quali sarà sempre piena la Repubblica Cristiana, e questo nostro Regno più che ogni altro; onde preser motivo alcuni valentuomini di travagliarsi per riducere queste due Potenze ad una perfetta armonia, e corrispondenza, e comunicarsi vicendevolmente la loro virtù, ed energia; essendosi per lunga sperienza conosciuto, che se l'Imperio soccorre con le sue forze al Sacerdozio, per mantenere l'onor di Dio; ed il Sacerdozio scambievolmente stringe, ed unisce l'affezion del Popolo all'ubbidienza al Principe, tutto lo Stato sarà florido, e felice; ma per contrario, se queste due Potenze sono discordanti fra loro, come se il Sacerdozio, altrepassando i confini del suo potere spirituale, intraprendesse sopra l'Imperio, e Governo Politico, ovvero se l'Imperio rivolgendo contra Dio quella forza, che gli ha messa tra le mani, volesse attentare sopra il Sacerdozio, tutto va in confusione, ed in ruina; di che potranno esser gran documento i molti disordini, che si sentiranno perciò in quest'istesso nostro Reame accaduti.[18]

[The Civil History, according to the present System of the Catholick World, surely cannot be separated from the Ecclesiastical. The Ecclesiastical State, vying with that of the Political and Temporal of Princes, is so strongly fix'd and rooted in Empire, by the means of their Statutes, that at present the Changes of the one cannot be distinctly perceiv'd without the Knowledge of the other. Therefore it is necessary to see, how and when the Ecclesiastical State intruded itself into Empire, and what Novelties it occasion'd in this Kingdom; which, truly, was one of the greatest Causes of the Change of its Political and Temporal State; and thereby, not without Astonishment, we shall discover, how, contrary to all the Laws of Government, one Empire hath been able to establish itself within another, and how the Priesthood often, by perverting the Devotion of the People, and its own Spiritual Power, hath incroach'd upon the temporal Government of this Kingdom, which was the Source of the numberless Disputes about Jurisdiction, with which the Christian Republick will always abound, and our Kingdom more than any other, which induc'd some worthy Men to labour to bring these two Powers to a perfect Harmony and Agreement, by mutually communicating their Power and Energy; it being known by long Experience, that if the Empire assist the Priesthood with its Power, in order to support the Honour of God, and if the Priesthood, in return, tie and unite the Affection of the People to the Obedience of the Prince, the whole State will flourish and be happy; but on the contrary, if these two Powers disagree with one another, so as that the Priesthood, by exceeding the Limits of its Spiritual

[18] *Ist. civ.*, I, ff. b verso–b 2.

Power, should incroach upon the Political Government, or if the latter, by turning against God that Power which he has put into its Hands, should intrench upon the Priesthood, all will go into Confusion and Ruin; of which the many Disorders which have happen'd on that account in this our Kingdom are flagrant Testimonies.][19]

The vision is almost medieval; but behind the image of a preordained harmony between the two powers lies the thought that, if Christ's kingdom is not of this world, it was the church's first acquisition of magistracy that prepared the way for its becoming an empire challenging that of Caesar, or Constantine. This, whenever it occurred, was the moment when poison was poured out on Christendom, and one did not have to be a Protestant to distinguish between a true church content with the things of the spirit, and a fallen or false church exercising power over the *cose del mondo*. This hint was enough to expose the author of the *Istoria civile* to persecution as a heretic, and Giannone ended his days in a Piedmontese prison, having written a work called the *Triregno* which revealed just how heterodox a form the attempt to bring the two powers to perfect correspondence could take.

Meanwhile, the historiographical position he had taken up in the introduction to the *Istoria civile* itself moved his argument in the direction he desired it to take. While giving nominal recognition to the doctrine that the Pope was head of the universal church by reason of the apostolic primacy accorded to Peter by Christ, he had supplied the papacy with a historical context that reduced its rise to contingency, and made it the outcome of a political contest for jurisdictions in southern Italy between two powerful patriarchs in Constantinople and Rome. The patriarchal interpretation of papal history had been employed by Howel in the reign of James II, and earlier by Peter Heylyn, an English (or Anglo-Welsh) Laudian so high in his churchmanship as to be hardly a Protestant at all, who had used it to disarm both papal claims and the puritan doctrine that the Pope was Antichrist. The papal usurpation, he had said, was not an event in the history of the spirit, so much as one occurring in a history governed by mere reason of state.[20] At the other end of the Anglican spectrum, John Selden's *Historie of Tithes* (1628), a work to which and to whose author Heylyn had been bitterly opposed,[21] had eliminated the claim that tithes were due *jure divino* by the sleight of hand of supplying them with a purely secular history made up of contexts and contingencies.[22] These were English arguments of which

[19] Ogilvie, I, p. ii. [20] Heylyn, 1652, 'To the Reader', sig. t, 4. [21] Heylyn, 1670, pp. 391–2.
[22] For Selden, see Woolf, 1990, pp. 216–39; Bershadsky, 1993; Christianson, 1996.

Giannone was probably unaware; he did not need to know them in order to use a secular history of the growth of Roman jurisdiction in constructing a civil history of Europe in terms of papacy and empire with the kingdom of Naples as the victim, and the creation, of the agelong (and in this sense *secolare*) conflicts between them.

Historical contingency was Giannone's strongest ideological weapon. The jurisdictional dependency of the southern provinces was paradoxically the cause of their historical autonomy. The civil laws established there by the Roman emperors had been feudalised by the Lombards and Normans, had declined under the Suabians and reached vanishing point, later to be revived, under the Angevins. This process had been reversed by the rise of legal humanist scholarship in the Aragonese and Spanish periods, and the university of Naples had a proud history of academic jurisprudence. Giannone recorded this process in terms of the interactions between widely varying Roman and barbarian legal systems; but the *regno* had been the theatre of these interactions precisely because, even when an independent kingdom under the Norman Roger II or the Hohenstaufen Frederick II, it had been a cockpit of Europe, a province dependent on conflict between greater systems, and because, from the end of the Lombard period, it had been exposed to the incessant aggressiveness of the papal jurisdiction whose history Giannone was using Neapolitan history to secularise. John Selden would have understood this strategy as one complementary to his own. He had used every proof of foreign incursion into the history of English common law as evidence of the autonomy of English history; if civil and feudal laws had reached England, it was because English custom and statute had had the strength to admit and assimilate them; English history was a history of autochthonous sovereignty.[23] The civil history of the kingdom of Naples was on the contrary a history of weakness; external power – a *primat der Aussenpolitik* – had in every case been the occasion of bringing new law to the southern provinces, and the kingdom itself had been the product of interaction between alien forces. There had never been a lack of regional response to these incursions; the people had been capable of evolving their own customs, the scholars of evolving their own jurisprudence; yet the *regno* had always been the subject, the patient rather than the agent, of history. Giannone's strength, as a historian of jurisdiction, was that he could turn weakness into strength by recounting each event imposed upon Naples by history,

[23] For this see Pocock, 1987a, pp. 286–9, 295–6, 302–3.

in terms so vividly particular as to make it autonomous and reduce the powerful outside agents – the popes and emperors, the Norman and Angevin adventurers, the Spaniards with their global empire – to actors in the historical contingency to which they had subjected the *regno*. It was the obverse of English ancient-constitutionalism; the lack of a Neapolitan constitution was itself ancient and gave the kingdom's history a meaning of its own, rooted in contingency.[24]

What the author of the *Decline and Fall* learned from the *Istoria civile* is a large question, best dealt with under a number of heads as they raise themselves; a few general points may be made here. Though the chronological sweep of Giannone's work is as great as that of Gibbon's or greater, its spatial extension is restricted. The theme of empire and barbarism was to carry Gibbon to the borders of China, India and sub-Saharan Africa; the theme of *la chiesa nella repubblica* was to confine Giannone to the history of southern Italy, on the whole excluding Sicily, and the universal powers of empire and papacy to the role of legislators at a distance (in the latter case a distance not so great as might be wished). The universal was there to explain the provincial. Secondly, the *Decline and Fall* is philosophic history in the sense that its scope is as great as the workings of the human mind and the entire range of human culture which the mind produces as its art; the *Istoria civile* is a history of jurisprudence as it makes and unmakes the autonomy of Neapolitan history, and other manifestations of culture appear as its incidental consequences. In the role of *scientia civilis*, jurisprudence could become the key to nearly all human culture,[25] and Vico's *Scienza nuova* – perhaps also Giannone's *Triregno* – testify how far into all history the juristic mind might reach. But there is a difference between starting with jurisprudence and starting with a perception of the human mind, as keys to the diversities of history and culture. To understand the *Decline and Fall*, therefore, we need to use Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume and Robertson

[24] A personal reminiscence is in order here. The late Rosario Romeo, a Sicilian historian who moved to Naples and ended his days in Rome, said to the present writer in Naples, one evening in 1957: 'Shall I tell you why this is a fascinating country for a historian? It is because now we have the Republic of Italy, and before that it was the Kingdom, and before that it was the Bourbons, and before that it was the Habsburgs, and before that it was the Spaniards . . .' and so back in time until he had reached the iron-age peoples who inhabited southern Italy before the coming of the Greeks, when he concluded triumphantly 'and none of it made any sense!' It was a very Southern oration, and at one level he meant that it was fascinating for a historian to be born and live where the real had never been the rational. Giannone had been able to exploit irrationality for rationalist ends, making contingency the rationale of jurisprudential and civil history; Romeo perhaps, living several historic mutations later, was falling back, in a highly Italian way, on the resource of absurdity. [25] Kelley, 1990.

as starting points; but the *Istoria civile* was a starting point in its own right. Its narrative and thematic structures did much, together with the Protestant roots of Gibbon's culture, to tell him what the friars were doing in the Temple of Jupiter, how the church came to be sitting on the grave of the Roman empire. This enquiry, at least as old as the Reformation, was increasingly coming to be part of the processes of Enlightenment.

CHAPTER 2

Popes and emperors: from the Isaurians to the Hohenstaufen

Giannone's four massive (but not gigantic) volumes published – with some difficulty[26] – at Naples in 1723 begin like Gibbon's with the Roman empire at its height in about 200 AD and continue to the death of Charles II of Spain in 1700. Gibbon's six volumes, published over a twelve-year period from 1776 to 1788, conclude at or about the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, an event to Giannone more immediate and threatening but of less epochal significance. Where Gibbon depicted the Antonine world as a complex civilisation, containing some causes of its own decay, Giannone was concerned with the empire as a structure of jurisdiction and jurisprudence, demonstrating the priority of *repubblica* over *chiesa* and providing the latter with the context in which its jurisdiction had been shaped to the point where it outgrew its host. Gibbon, in some measure a civic humanist, was concerned with ancient and republican virtue and its decay under Augustan peace and commerce; Giannone, a jurist and civil (rather than civic) humanist,[27] was interested in the empire as author of Roman law, and mentioned the republic as source of Roman virtue only in passing. Roman law provided the universal setting in which the local and particular history of the Neapolitan region began. His opening chapter depicted the contingency of a history shaped by the sea and by laws and empires it had not made for itself.

Quest'ampia, e possente parte d'Italia, che Regno di Napoli oggi s'appella, il qual circondato dall'uno, e dall'altro mare, superiore ed inferiore, non ha altro confine mediterraneo, che lo Stato della Chiesa di Roma, quando per le vittoriose armi del Popolo Romano fu avventurosamente aggiunta al suo Imperio, ebbe forma di governo pur troppo diversa da quella, che sorti dapoi ne'tempi degli stessi Romani Imperadori. Nuova politia sperimentò quando sotto la dominazione de'Re d'Italia pervenne. Altri cambiamenti vide sotto

[26] Sergio Bertelli, 'Introduzione', in Bertelli and Ricuperati, 1971, pp. xiv–xv.
[27] I owe this distinction to Donald R. Kelley; see particularly Kelley, 1990, pp. 144–7.

gl'Imperadori d'Oriente. E vie più strane alterazioni sofferse, quando per vari casi trapassata di Gente in Gente, finalemente sotto l'Augustissima Famiglia Austriaca pervenne.[28]

[That large and potent Part of Italy, which now is call'd the Kingdom of Naples, being surrounded both by the Upper and Lower Seas, has no other inland Limit but the Estate of the Church of Rome; when, by the victorious Arms of the People of Rome, it was happily join'd to their Empire, (it) had a Form of Government very different from that which it had afterwards in the Times of the Roman Emperors. When it came under the Dominion of the Kings of Italy it got a new Polity. It suffer'd other Changes under the Emperors of the East. And it underwent many more strange Alterations, when by various Fortune it pass'd from one People to another: At last it came under the most august Family of Austria.][29]

Giannone is not to be the historian of an empire, but of a province exposed by sea and land which has found itself subject to many empires and seen the empires themselves change. It has from a date yet to be determined shared a common frontier with the Papal State or State of the Church, an empire unlike any other because it both disclaims being an empire and should not be the empire which in fact it is. This is to be a history of usurpation, in which usurpation becomes – very much in the Italian manner – history's principal subject; and the usurping power of the church, claiming to act outside history, both makes history and can be shown as itself subject to it. Civil history, for Giannone as for Marsilius of Padua long before him, both establishes a history independent of the church and reduces the church to history.

Civil history, furthermore, is a history of civil law. As a jurist and a civilian, Giannone the historian of Rome is a historian of the empire, under which the great codes and commentaries came into being, and shows far less interest than Gibbon in the decline of the republic and its liberty and virtue. He concedes that the expansion of Caesar's jurisdiction – down to and including the Edict of Caracalla which made Roman citizenship universal – was inspired by the aim of making all men subject to monarchy;[30] but the growth and consolidation of Roman law provides the *Istoria civile* with its central structure. Since this is to be a history of imperfection, however, it is not built up as a series of panegyrics, and as Justinian in particular is to be a figure as destructive as he is constructive, he is preceded in the role of codifier by Valentinian III and

[28] *Ist. civ.*, I, p. 1 (book I, introduction).
[29] Ogilvie, I, p. 1. Note that 'mediterraneo' is being literally translated.
[30] *Ist. civ.*, I, pp. 9–10 (book I, c. 2), 34–6 (book I, c. 8).

Theodosius, the latter of whom in some respects outdoes him.[31] Long before this, the emphasis falls on the successive reorganisations of the empire's provinces and the authority of their governors by Augustus, Trajan and Diocletian, since this is what defines the regions of administration which are to constitute *le nostre provincie* and *il regno di Napoli*. Provincial government and codified jurisprudence provide the context of secular rule within which – *nella repubblica, nel impero* – the church is to arise and from which it is to derive its structure; the spiritual authority of bishops and patriarchs is to take on territoriality from the jurisdiction of the cities, provinces and dioceses defined by the empire, at the head of which bishops find themselves as the authority of empire declines.

Civil history is the context within which ecclesiastical history takes shape. Jesus leaves behind him an apostolic church whose kingdom is not of this world, and whose officers exercise only such authority as is necessary for the determination of spiritual matters. With Constantine the church becomes co-extensive with the empire; but Giannone insists that there was, as there should be, no competition between these two, and blames Constantine neither for subjecting the church to secular rule nor for making unwise concessions or donations to ecclesiastical jurisdiction.[32] His error lies elsewhere, in the removal of the imperial capital to Constantinople,[33] for this fatally weakened the authority of the prefects of Rome over the southern provinces – on which Giannone's eye is always focused – and prepared the way for their exposure and vulnerability before what was to prove the mounting secular power of the Roman bishop. It was to be a long and complex historical process, and Giannone took his time in telling it. From the house of Constantine – in particular from Constantius and Julian the Apostate – the story moves with gathering speed through the successive Valentinians to the house of Theodosius, under whose sons the imperial authority loses its grip on the western provinces, and Italy is occupied by the Goths. Not even Alaric's sack of Rome, however, is a climacteric disaster, since Theodoric's kingdom of Italy conserves with little change the structures of Roman provincial government and Roman jurisprudence – the latter in a form that owes nothing to Justinian's codes and Pandects. It is this emperor, indeed, whose armies invade and destroy the admirable Gothic kingdom,[34] leaving the peninsula south of Rome under an unsteady Byzantine grasp which is obliged to share power with the incoming Lombards. Their dukes and kings, though by no means

[31] *Ist. civ.*, I, p. 112 (book II, c.6). [32] *Ist. civ.*, I, pp. 47–52 (book I, final chapter).
[33] *Ist. civ.*, I, p. 26 (book I, c. 6). [34] *Ist. civ.*, I (book III, final chapter)

devoid of the legislative virtue of Theodoric,[35] are in turn fatally weakened by the presence of East Roman power, and it is this instability that furnishes the vacuum which Popes are to fill by expanding their secular jurisdiction and their not ill-intentioned diplomacy. It is also under the Lombards that feudal institutions appear;[36] Giannone supplies his version of this favourite theme of legal historians since the French Renaissance, without forgetting to remark that it was through the passage of fiefs into ecclesiastical hands that the papacy initiated and exploited its penetration of secular government in the centuries to come.

The next grand crisis in his story – one to which Gibbon was to devote comparable space but a significantly different emphasis in his treatment – is furnished by the iconoclast controversy and the disastrous intervention of the Emperor Leo the Isaurian. For the first time, religious fanaticism and the secular ambitions it conceals and distorts make their appearance in a *storia* now *ecclesiastica* as well as *civile*. Giannone does not doubt that Leo was misled by false prophets in his own realm, who promised him salvation if he overthrew the veneration of images, but does not doubt either that he extended iconoclast policy to Italy in order to strengthen his power there, by ordaining and imposing a radical change in Christian practice.[37] It is not the last time that religious enthusiasm will appear as both the motor and the instrument of imperial power, in Gibbon's writings as well as Giannone's. The policy proves disastrous, however, since Italians, living far from the imperial palace and its authority, have grown accustomed to venerating the images of saints in the hope of their intercession in heaven;[38] and iconoclasm therefore stirs up the fury of popular religion, in a way that the conflicts between Arian and Catholic doctrine have not previously done.[39] This is the point – as it was to be in Gibbon's rather different reading of these events – at which the papacy is seen responding to complex pressures in ways that make it a principal actor in the history of the eighth century. Pope Gregory II perceives that the Lombard rulers are the true target of Byzantine policy, but fears that their vigorous reaction will end in his subjugation to them.[40] He therefore temporises, accepting the iconoclast decrees in form but impeding their execution in practice. Leo gives way to the ungoverned rage which transforms a prudent if daring prince into a tyrant[41] – the language is Tacitist and neo-classical throughout – and

[35] *Ist. civ.*, I, (book V, cc. 1, 5). [36] *Ist. civ.*, I, pp. 248–50 (book IV, c. 3).
[37] *Ist. civ.*, I, pp. 312–14 (book V, c. 2). [38] *Ist. civ.*, I, p. 313.
[39] *Ist. civ* I, pp. 313, 314, 317, 318. [40] *Ist. civ.*, I, pp. 314–15.
[41] *Ist. civ.*, I, pp. 315, 316, 319, 322.

through his exarch in Ravenna begins to attack the policy and even the person of the Pope. The outcome is that popular rebellion, Venetian support and Lombard action combine to bring about the destruction of the Exarchate and the drastic reduction of Byzantine power in Italy.[42] Pope Gregory, however, who in Gibbon's account, published in 1788, plays the role of a liberator and a revolutionary[43] – remains a supporter of imperial authority, moved both by the reason of state which makes him see the Lombards as the more immediate threat, and by his continued acceptance of what Giannone presents as the proper view of the relation of the church to secular magistracy.[44] The *Istoria civile* avoids depicting the popes as plotters through the ages; it is a better strategy to present their rise to secular power as occurring among the contingencies of *ragione di stato*. The tale that Gregory II excommunicated Leo and released his subjects from their allegiance is firmly dismissed;[45] it was not until Gregory VII, three centuries later, that popes claimed such authority over emperors. The story was invented by Greeks desiring to discredit the Pope, and perpetuated by later Roman extremists writing to uphold the deposing power; Giannone, for the first but not the last time, has resort to French Gallican scholars who share his desire to set the history of papal authority in a context of jurisdiction and reason of state – in which there is room for popes to act with good intentions but unanticipated consequences.

The origins of the church's temporal power in Italy are located in the dilemma of Gregory II and his successors, caught between a hostile emperor still in control of Naples and aggressive Lombards likely to seize control of Rome and its territory. They therefore assert their own control of Rome, employing the majesty of religion in doing so,[46] and are impelled, by the Byzantine no less than the Lombard response to their actions, to invite the support of the Frankish kingdom and its intervention in Italian affairs.[47] This is the point at which Gibbon was to place the end of late antique and the beginning of 'modern' history;[48] he saw the latter as marked by the intervention of the spiritual power in temporal affairs, by its erection first of the kingdom of France and later of the medieval western empire as its protector, and by its subsequent contests with its own creations. But it was clear to Giannone, two

[42] *Ist civ.*, I (book v, c. 2).
[43] *Decline and Fall*, vol. v, ch. 49; Womersley, III, pp. 97–105; Bury, v, pp. 277–8, 280–2.
[44] *Ist civ.*, I (book v, c. 4): 'Origine del dominio temporale de' Romani Pontefici in Italia.'
[45] *Ist civ.*, I, pp. 322–5. Cf. Howel, cited in *EEG*, pp. 38–9.
[46] *Ist civ.*, I, p. 321.
[47] *Ist civ.*, (book v, c. 5).
[48] *Decline and Fall*, vol. v ch. 49; Womersley, III, p. 109; Bury, v, p. 286.

generations before Gibbon, that the overweening power of the papacy in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries originated not in malignant priestly calculation, but in the steps taken to protect the extremely vulnerable position it occupied in the eighth and again in the ninth. It was possible to narrate these transactions from more than one point of view, and to treat papal behaviour with sympathy as well as hostility; but it was its reduction to the domain of secular contingency that formed Giannone's real weapon against it. The origins of both temporal weakness and spiritual pride must be found much earlier in history.

It was a consequence both of Giannone's treatment of the eighth-century crisis, and of the premises governing the entire plan of his work, that he never became a Ghibelline historian, finding like Dante the true location of Christian authority in the universal rule of a Latin emperor. He was a historian *del regno di Napoli*, and in the long history of its exposure, insecurity, dependence on outside power, and weakness in the face of the church, we must paradoxically discern his conviction that it is only the autonomous territorial state which can hope to maintain its jurisdictional independence. From Charlemagne through the Saxon and Salian successors to the Carolingians, he is insistent on seeing the western emperors as *re di Francia*, *re di Germania* and *re d'Italia*; and if their failure to maintain all three roles and the last in particular is the key to the history of the *regno di Napoli*, their position as kings first and emperors second renders futile any suggestion that universal empire in the west is conferred by either the people or the bishop of Rome. The Carolingians and Salians are so far from claiming such an empire that they do not even challenge what is left of Byzantine – here and there overtaken by Arab – control in the far south of Italy; and it is the history of this power vacuum, the work of Constantine, Justinian and Leo in succession, that furnishes Giannone with the subject carrying him from his first into his second volume.

He shows the vacuum being filled in two ways: first by the growth and mutation of laws primarily Roman, but affected by Gothic, Lombard and feudal developments;[49] second by the adventitious arrival of the Normans, adventurers, mercenaries and in due time conquistadors who, playing their own hand in the complex politics of the south and the far-reaching developments brought on by the Popes in launching the Crusades, succeed for the first time since Theodoric in establishing an autonomous and ambitious kingdom with its bases purely in peninsular

[49] See in particular *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 19–21 (book IX, c. 1).

Apulia and insular Sicily. Giannone's narrative moves into humanist high gear with the advent of these heroic if none too scrupulous *principi nuovi* – Robert Guiscard, Bohemond of Antioch, the two Rogers and the first of the two Williams – who become the kings and the legislators of a great age in southern history. But the Popes promote the Normans and then are led into plotting against them; and if they have no hesitation about repelling papal designs by war if need be, the pontiffs' resort to spiritual and temporal weapons in combination raises up the universal conflict between empire and papacy with which the Normans and their Suabian or Hohenstaufen successors will not be quite able to cope. The rise of Norman power has for background the momentous struggle over investitures, and it is characteristic of Giannone's insistence that spiritual and temporal authority are different in kind and belong in different worlds, that he depicts the disastrous decisions to take arms as made by Popes of genuine virtue and sanctity;[50] the good and the bad in them do not diminish each other. This dual vision reaches its height in the figure of Gregory VII, reformer of the church, imposer of clerical celibacy, excommunicator and deposer of emperors. When he dies in 1085, the same year as Robert Guiscard, Giannone supplies a rhetorical portrait which must be read as an exercise in the higher irony, if in irony at all. There need be no Voltairean or Gibbonian innuendo, no covert displacement of conventional language, perhaps no sense that the counterpoised values are incompatible at all, when Giannone writes that in Gregory the church

perdette un Papa il più forte, ed intrepido di quanti mai ne fiorirono in tutti i secoli: egli non si curava punto d'esporsi a' più evidenti pericoli, ove vi correva il rischio della sua stima, e sovente della libertà, per difendere contro i maggiori Re della Terra, e Monarchi del Mondo quelle prerogative, e preminenze ch'e' riputava appartenersi alla Sede Appostolica; e persuaso che tutto ciò, ch'intraprendeva fosse appoggiato a' fondamenti giustissimi, rendevasi per ciò più animoso, e forte sopra i Principi stessi. Egli fù che alzando il suo pastorale sopra scettri, e corone, come se l'esser Capo della Chiesa Universale, portasse ancora con se esser Monarca del Mondo, e Re de'Re, ed Imperadore degl'Imperadori, trattava i Principi, e gl'Imperadori stessi con tanto strapazzo, ed alterigia, che non si ritenne di scomunicargli, di deporgli da loro Stati, transferirgli in altre Nazioni, e sciorre i vassali dalla loro ubbidienza.

E mostrando esser persuaso di poterlo fare, nè moversi se non per zelo di giustizia, e per difesa della Sede Appostolica, acquistò appresso molti gran plauso di zelante, e di pio, di uomo ripieno di Religione, giusto, dotto

[50] See the accounts given of Leo IX, *Ist civ.*, II, pp. 40–1 (book IX, c. 4), Stephen IX or X (pp. 49–50, c. 5), Innocent II (pp. 165–6, book XI, c. 3).

Canonista, e buon Teologo, e difensore intrepido de'diritti, e libertà Ecclesiastiche. Alle quali cose aggiungendo alcune altre virtù, delle quali era adorno, come d'un vita austera, e d'indefessa applicazione agl'interessi di quella Sede, d'un animo misericordio verso i poveri, di prender la difesa degli oppressi, e di proteggere gl'innocenti, acquistonne fama di Santo; tanto che se bene avesse di sè lasciata presso alcuni Scrittori suoi contemporanei fama diversa, dandogli alcuni il titolo di novatore, d'ambizioso, di crudele, senza fede, altiero, di perturbatore de' Regni, e di Provincie, d'autor di sedizioni, di morti, e di crudeli guerre, e d'aver voluto stabilire un dominio insoffribile nella Chiesa, tanto sopra lo spiritual, quanto sopra il temporale; non sono mancati però altri, secondo che la fazioni portavano, di averlo per un Pontefice tutto zelo pe'l servizio di Dio, tutto saggio, tutto pio, e misericordio: e che avendo con rara unione insieme accoppiato alla santità de' costumi la fortezza, e l'intrepidezza d'animo sopra tutti i Principi della Terra, abbia trovato negli ultimi nostri tempi chi l'abbia dato il sopranome di Grande, non altrimente di ciò che fù appellato Gregorio I dello Magno. Ma niun altro più meglio, e più al vivo ci diede il ritratto di questo Pontefice: quanto quel giudizioso Dipintore che lo dipinse nella Chiesa di S. Severino di Napoli. Vedesi quivi l'immagine di questo Papa, tra le altre de' Pontefici dell' Ordine di S. Bennedetto, avere nella sinistra mano il pastorale co'pesci, nella destra, alzata in atto di percotere, una terrible scuriada, e sotto i piedi scettri, e corone Imperiali, e Regali, in atta di flagellargli. E dopo avere così mostrato essere stato Gregorio il terrore, e il flagello de' Principi, e calpestrare scettri, e corone: volendo ancora far vedere, che tutto ciò poteva ben accoppiarsi colla santità, e mondezza de' suoi costumi, sopra il suo capo scrisse in lettere cubitali queste parole: *Sanctus Gregorius VII.*[51]

[. . . lost a Pope the most Daring and Intrepid of all that ever had possess'd that See; he did not stick at the most evident dangers, where his Honour or Liberty were at Stake, in order to defend those Prerogatives and Pre-eminences which he reckon'd belong'd to the Apostolick See, against the greatest Kings and Monarchs of the Earth; and if he was persuaded that what he took in Hand was supported by just Pretensions, he became more bold and forward than the Princes themselves. It was he, who raising his Crosier above Scepters and crowns, as if his being Head of the Universal Church, had intitled him to be Monarch of the World, and King of Kings, and Emperor of Emperors; treated Princes, yea, the very Emperors, with so much Disdain and Haughtiness, that he did not scruple to excommunicate them, depose them from their Dominions, which he transferr'd to other Nations, and absolve their Vassals from their Obedience.

By his seeming to be convinc'd that he had Power to do all this, and by his great Zeal for Justice, and the Defence of the Apostolick See, he gain'd the Applause of many, who reckon'd him a Zealous, Pious, Religious, and Just Man, a learned Canonist, a good Divine, and a bold Defender of the Ecclesiastical Rights and Liberties. To which were added some other Virtues, wherewith

[51] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 88–9 (book X, c. 6).

he was adorn'd, such as an austere Life, and an unwearied Application to the Interest of that See; his Compassion towards the Poor, his defending the Oppressed, and protecting the Innocent, acquir'd him the Fame of a Saint; so that tho' some of his contemporary Writers have given him a different Character, some calling him an Innovator, Ambitious, Cruel, Perfidious, Haughty, a Disturber of Kingdoms and Provinces, Author of Seditions, Slaughter, and cruel Wars, and who had a Mind to establish an intolerable Authority in the Church, as well in Spirituals as Temporals; yet there are others, according as their Interest led them, who have given him the Character of a Pope altogether zealous for the service of God, wise, pious, and merciful; yea, a Modern Author gives to him, no less than to Gregory I, the Surname of Great, because to a certain Greatness of Soul, and Intrepidity of Mind, he join'd a holy Life and Conversation, above all the Princes of his Time. But none has drawn the Picture of this Pope better, or so much to the Life, as that judicious Painter, who drew it in the Church of St. Severino in Naples. We see there the Image of this Pope, amongst those of the other Pontiffs of the Order of St Benedict, having in his Left-Hand the Crosier with Fishes, in the Right-Hand, lifted up in a lashing Posture, a prodigious Scourge, and under his Feet, Sceptres, Imperial and Royal Crowns. And after having shewn Gregory to have been the Terror and Scourge of Princes, and to have trampled on Sceptres and Crowns; being likewise willing to shew, that all this was very consistent with a holy Life, and Purity of Manners, he has written above his Head, in Letters a Cubit long, these Words; Sanctus Gregorius VII.][52]

There is more than the rhetorician's ability to present facts in two opposing lights, more than the historian's ability to follow two authorities at once, about this portrait of a great if disastrous man (which Gibbon in his own way followed[53]); nor should we allow the phrase 'secondo che le fazioni portavano' to lure us into a sceptical dismissal of both sets of testimonies. Giannone knows that it is possible for humans to live, and be judged, according to two utterly different sets of values, which are those of one world and those of another; and he has not the Protestant's, or the *philosophe's*, anger and incredulity that the world of personal sanctity should claim independence of, or co-existence with, the world of good rulership and civil reason. Both Gregories are real to him, because they inhabit both the kingdom of this world and the kingdom which is not of it; and the conjunction carries him beyond the reach of simply philosophic irony. It was in his last work, the *Triregno*, that he began speculating whether, if there were two kingdoms and perhaps two worlds, there might be a third – an enquiry suggesting the *esprit fort* rather than the *philosophe*.

[52] Ogilvie, I, p. 466.
[53] *Decline and Fall*, vol. V, ch. 56, n. 83; Womersley, III, p. 504, n. 83; Bury, VI, p. 212, n. 101.

The history of the Norman kingdom, and the attempts of the Suabian Hohenstaufen to retain it, takes up the remainder of Giannone's second volume; it is a history of war and legislation. It is also the nearest thing to a golden age in the *Istoria civile*; the *regno di Napoli* was then able to make its own laws and policies. However, the term used in his title is at this point somewhat anachronistic. The centre of Norman rule at its height was at Palermo, and their realm was later known as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Giannone examines this usage, suggesting that there was once a mainland 'Sicily', embracing Calabria, Basilicata and possibly Apulia, north of the Straits of Messina, as well as an insular 'Sicily' beyond them.[54] His *regno di Napoli* was centred in that city only from Angevin times, and his first volumes trace the history of power variously based in Benevento, Capua, Bari and Palermo; it is clear also that the island sometimes called Trinacria was a neighbouring but distinct land in his mind, having its own customs and its own legal and civil history, which he recounts when it falls in his way. It was the Normans who introduced feudal tenures to Sicily proper, in an extension of the process whereby they retained and developed Lombard law, already feudalised in some measure, as that of the peninsular provinces of their realm. Towards this Giannone displays mixed feelings. On the one hand the Normans, exercising the conqueror's right to annul or retain the laws of a conquered province, were maintaining their kingdom's autonomy; on the other:

Le leggi Romane erano, come più volte si è notato, solamente ritenute come una tradizione; e presso la plebe, ch'è l'ultima a deporre gli antichi istituti, erano rimase come antica usanza, non già come legge scritti. La Romana Giurisprudenza, ed i libri di Giustiniano, ne' quali era contenuta (siccome tutte l'altre discipline) erano andati in dimenticanza, e d'essi rara era la notizia in questi tempi, ed in queste nostre parti, è molto meno lo studio, e l'applicazione.[55]

[The Roman Laws, as we have often observ'd, were only retain'd by way of Tradition; and they had remain'd amongst the common People (who are always last in laying aside the ancient Usages) as old Customs, and not as written Laws. The Roman Jurisprudence, and the Books of Justinian, in which it was contain'd (like all other Learning) had been forgot, and were very little known in these Times, and these Parts; so far were they from being read.][56]

But due credit must be given (he adds) to the monastery of Cassino,

[54] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 172–8 (book XI, c. 4).
[55] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 112–13 (book X, c. 11).
[56] Ogilvie, I, p. 483.

where learning was kept alive and some books of Justinian's were retained. Jurisprudence, however, was studious but not yet forensic; only in the Church of Rome (he admits), under some western emperors, and in the France of Ivo of Chartres, was Roman law of some authority in the courts. Neverthelesss Giannone is retaining the strategy of an ancient-constitutionalist. Roman law survives in the south as unwritten custom, and once it is revived as high culture, through the rediscovery of texts, the legislation of strong rulers, and the universities they found, it will return to the courts, interact with feudal law, and give the kingdom the character of a legal polity with jurisprudence and jurisdictions of its own.

This is Giannone's perception of a medieval enlightenment, which he situates in the twelfth century. He dislikes what the Roman clergy have become as heartily as any *philosophe* after him, but since the civil history of his *patria* had reached its height in the age of glossators and scholastics, he does not join his northern contemporaries in condemning the millennium after Constantine as an unrelieved night of Aristotelian darkness. He applies the language of renaissance to the twelfth-century revival.

Nel principio di questo secolo risvegliati gl'ingegni dal sonno in cui erano stati nel precedente, si applicarono alle discipline; ed i contrasti che vi furono non meno fra gl'Imperadori d'Occidente, ed i Romani Pontefici, che fra i Greci, ed i Latini, eccitarono gli animi a' studj, e diedero occasione a coloro, che s'erano attaccati ad un de'partiti, e che aveano qualche capacità, d'esercitare le penne, e di far comparire il lor sapere. Lo scisma, che in questi tempi teneva divisa la Chiesa Greca dalla Latina, e particolarmente la contenzione sopra il Dogma della processione dello Spirito Santo, teneva ancora esercitati gl'ingegni, perchè più del solito s'applicassero a' studj Sacri, e della Teologia. Alcuni imitarono assai bene gli Antichi, o nello stile, o nella maniera di scrivere, ma per la maggior parte essendo senza cognizione di lingue, e di storia, sentirono della barbarie, e della rozzezza del secolo precedente; ed alcuni cadettero nella maniera di scrivera secca, e sterile de'Dialettici. Lo studio della Teologia, e delle altre scienze, che nel secolo precedente era stato posto in dimanticanza, fu tra di noi rinovato per opera de' Monaci, ma sopra ogni altro per quelli di Monte Cassino. Nel principio, ogni uno contentavasi di seguire l'antico metodo, e di riferire l'esplicazione de'Padri sopra la Scrittura Sacra; nè trattavano de' Dogmi che di passaggio, e per accidente. Ma sul fine di questo secolo si cominciarono a fare delle Lezioni di Teologia sopra i Dogmi della Religione; a proponere varie quistioni sopra i nostri misteri, e a risolverle per via di ragionamenti, e secondo il metodo della Dialettica. I libri d'Aristotele cominciavano a farsi sentire per gli Arabi che a noi gli portarono, e credettero i nostri Teologi averne bisogno per le dispute contro i Giudei, e contro gli Arabi stessi, onde l'accomodarono alla nostra Religione, i cui Dogmi, e Morale spiegarono secondo i principi di questo Filosofo, e trattarono la dottrina della Scrittura, e de' Padri coll'ordine, e con gli organi della Dialettica, e della Metafisica tratta da' suoi scritti. Questo fu l'origine della Teologia *Scolastica*, che divenne poco dapoi la principale, e quasi l'unica applicazione de'nostri Monaci, e delle nostre Scuole.[57]

[In the beginning of this Century Mens Spirits being rouz'd from the Lethargy in which they had been in the preceding, apply'd themselves to Learning; and the Differences between the Emperors of the West and the Popes, and between the Greeks and the Latins, incited Men to apply their Minds to study, and gave occasion to those who were attach'd to one of the Parties, and who had any Capacity, to employ their Pens, and to shew their Parts. The Schism, which at this Time divided the Greek and Latin Churches, and particularly the Dispute about the Opinion concerning the Procession of the Holy Ghost, likewise excited Men of Learning to a more than ordinary Study, both of the Scriptures and Theological Writings. Some imitated the Ancients very near both in Stile and Manner of Writing; but for the most part being ignorant of Languages and History, they savour'd of the Barbarism and Harshness of the preceding Century; and some fell into the dry and barren Dialectick Way. The Study of Divinity and other Sciences, which had been neglected in the foregoing Century, was reviv'd among us by the Monks, but especially by those of Monte Cassino. At the first every one was satisfied to follow the ancient Method, and to quote the Explication of the Fathers upon the Holy Scriptures; and did not treat of Points of Doctrine but slightly and casually. But towards the latter End of this Century, Lectures of Divinity on Points of Religion came in use; and sundry mysterious Questions were propos'd, and solv'd by way of Reasoning, in a Logical manner. The Books of Aristotle began to be known among the Arabs, who brought them to us; and our Divines thought they would be useful in the Disputes against the Jews, and the Arabs themselves, therefore they adapted them to our Religion, the Doctrine and Morals of which they explain'd according to the Principles of this Philosopher, and treated of the doctrine of the Scriptures and Fathers after the Order and Rules of Logick and Metaphysicks taken from his Writings. This was the Rise of Scholastic Divinity, which soon after became the Principal, and almost the only Study of our Monks and Schools.][58]

It is the antithesis of Hobbes's vision. Instead of disrupting civil authority and opening the door to false philosophy and civil war, scholastic disputation encourages the learned to think for themselves and lay the foundations of their own intellectual culture. From patristic and scholastic learning they venture out into the humanities, and Arab

[57] *Ist. civ.*, II, p. 119 (book X, c. 1).

[58] Ogilvie, I, pp. 487–8. The translation 'sundry mysterious questions' is somewhat more anti-scholastic than the original 'varie quistioni sopra i nostri misteri'.

medicine receives its due in the account of the foundation of Salerno. But the essential alliance, in any account of the intellectual history of the southern kingdom, must be that between scholasticism and jurisprudence, both disputatious to the point of being forensic and therefore public, carried on in a civil realm under the protection of strong princes.

The Pandects are recovered in Amalfi under the reign of Roger, first king of Sicily and Apulia,[59] but it is in the time of his predecessor Count Roger that we hear of the Norman rulers being invested with authority by the Popes and obtaining the title of Apostolic Legate with respect to the island in particular. This is obviously a crucial point, being that at which the kingdom can be made to appear subject to papal jurisdiction. Giannone is at pains to couple the grant of legatine authority with the use of sacred unction in the coronations of the kings – a point of equal or greater importance in the doctrine of Gallican monarchy – to show that the Popes were not granting or conceding jurisdiction to the Normans, so much as recognising that the *potestas jurisdictionis*, extending to civil authority over churchmen themselves, is sacred in its origin and conferred on kings with the holy oil used in coronation.[60] A king does not of course exercise the *potestas ordinis* – it is for bishops to ordain as it is for priests to absolve – and cannot be head of a church; nor of course can a queen. Giannone has earlier given an orthodox castigation of the Anglican heresy in this particular;[61] but he gives more space to an account of the defeat of the seventeenth-century historian Cardinal Baronius, who had tried to declare the Sicilian kingdom forfeit to the papacy and been soundly rebuffed by both the Spanish and the Austrian rulers of Naples.[62] In the last analysis, neither the pope nor the emperor – Giannone, we see again, was never a Ghibelline, even when dedicating his book to Charles VI – has the authority to confer kingdoms:

poichè la Sovranità non procede altronde, che o dallo conquista, o dalla sommessione de' Popoli; nè il Papa, secondo quel che si sarà potuto notare in più luoghi di quest'Istoria, come successore di S. Pietro, o Viccario di Cristo ha ragione di poterlo pretendere, non essendo stata la potestà data a S. Pietro da colui, che si dichiarò il Regno suo non esser di questo Mondo, ma quella fù tutta spirituale, e tutta drizzata al Cielo, come a bastanza nel primo libro, quando della politia Ecclesiastica ci fù data occasione di ragionare, fù dimostrato. E se oggi lo vediamo Signore di tanti Stati, ed aver sì belle ed insigni prerogative negli Stati altrui, tutto fù o per concessione de' Principi, e loro tolleranza, o per consuetudine, che col tempo introdotte, par la loro esquisita

[59] *Ist. civ.*,II (book XI, c. 12). [60] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 96–7 (book X, c. 8).
[61] *Ist. civ.*, II, p. 51 (book I, final chapter)
[62] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 99–101. For a modern account see Pullapilly, 1975.

diligenza, ed accortezza, avendo a lungo andare poste profonde radici, non poteron poi in molte parti più sradicarsi, come ne puo esser ben chiaro esempio questo nostro Reame, che per volontaria esibizione de' suoi Principi fù reso a quella Sede Feudatario, i quali o per loro concessione, o tolleranza molte cose sù di esso la permisero: delle quali avremo molte occasioni di notare nel corso di questa istoria.[63]

[. . . for Sovereignty proceeds from nothing else, but either from Conquest, or the Submission of the People; neither has the Pope, as may be observ'd in many Places of this History, as Successor to St Peter, or as Vicar of Christ, any Right to pretend to it; for the Power given to St Peter, by him who declar'd that his Kingdom was not of this World, had no relation to an Earthly and Temporal, but to a Spiritual and Eternal Kingdom in Heaven, as we have fully demonstrated in the first Book, when we had occasion to treat of the Ecclesiastical Polity. And tho' now a-Days we see him Lord of so many States, and in Possession of many notable Prerogatives in the Dominions of other Princes, yet all is owing either to the Concession and Toleration of Princes, or to Custom, which by length of Time, and their exquisite Management and Cunning, has taken such deep Root, that in many Countries 'tis not possible to eradicate it, whereof our Kingdom is a very flagrant Instance, which became a Fief of the Church, by the voluntary Concession and Connivance of its Princes, who permitted the Popes to make many Incroachments, as we shall see in the Course of this History.][64]

As for the western emperor – to whom Giannone's book is dedicated – since he is not like his ancient predecessors a universal conqueror, he cannot (and does not claim to) bestow kingdoms he has not conquered. A king is sovereign, if not *imperator in suo regno*, either by right of conquest, or by voluntary submission of its people; and it is worth remembering – firmly though this reading of their history was rejected by the English – that even conquerors have normally entered into pacts of concession with those they have conquered, by which, or by the sheer authority of use and custom itself, they are bound to recognise their ancient laws, whose history may itself be a complex story of blending, imposition and acceptance. It does not matter, therefore, how often the southern provinces have been conquered and reconquered; the fact of conquest alone guarantees their laws against ecclesiastical intrusions; even where these have occurred it has been through complex processes of judicial acceptance; and the history of southern law, Roman and feudal, written and unwritten, may merge with the history of conquests – even of papal conquests – to assert the authority of the temporal, of history itself, against the perversion of the spiritual when it enters a history to which it

[63] *Ist. civ.*, II, p. 141 (book XI, introduction). [64] Ogilvie, I, p. 504.

does not belong. Giannone adheres firmly to what was until our own time the general faith of Europe: that each people generates its sovereignty out of its history, and can no more part with it than it can with its identity.

The Emperor Frederick Barbarossa is so much an enemy of the Norman kings that they are obliged to an alliance with the Pope against him. He removes the Pandects from Amalfi to Bologna, where there arises a jurisprudence pressing his claims to universal empire so far that it is challenged, both there and by the increasingly active legal learning of the south. The sovereignty of kings and peoples needs to be asserted against emperors, but the revival of civil law even by the latter is a potent weapon against the Popes. The great age of Neapolitan jurisprudence has begun, and it is argued at length that the *Libri feudorum*, which harmonised Lombard feudal law with the revived Pandects, were not imposed on the Sicilian kingdom by imperial decree, but received by southern jurists to the extent that its condition rendered appropriate.[65] When the Norman line fails, the kingdom passes into the hands of Frederick II, and Norman and Suabian history become one. Frederick is the great legislator of this phase of southern history, an author of laws, a patron of learning, a founder of universities and a builder of cities; a brilliant and enigmatic figure concerning whose alleged unorthodoxy something is said, yet somehow never quite the creative author of an alternative to the Innocentine papacy that historians in our own century have tried to make of him. Gibbon, who might have made of him a medieval Julian the Apostate, did not exploit this opportunity either; perhaps the ironies of his career lay outside the Enlightened vocabulary. When we read that Frederick, excommunicated by the Pope for failure to go on Crusade, sailed to Palestine with an army signed with the Cross, but was excommunicated anew for making peace with the Muslims by a Pope who invaded his dominions with troops under the sign of the Keys, whereat he returned and the *crocesignati* soundly defeated the *chiavesignati* and drove them back to Rome,[66] we seem to have a subject worthy of Gibbon at his richest; but the episode is treated cursorily in the *Decline and Fall*.[67] Giannone's view seems to be that Frederick's interests as king of Sicily were not identical with his interests as emperor, in which capacity the Guelf cities of Lombardy resisted him under papal protection for much the same reasons as he had for resisting the Pope in

[65] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 296–302 (book XII, final chapter).
[66] *Ist. civ.*, II, pp. 407 (book XVI, c. 6), 435 (book XVII, c. 2).
[67] *Decline and Fall*, vol. VI, ch. 59; Womersley, III, pp. 646–8; Bury, VI, pp. 371–3.

defence of his own sovereignty. Yet his deposition by Innocent IV at the Council of Lyons is opposed by most kings and princes – it is the papal claim to the deposing power, long opposed at the cost of much blood by Anglicans and Gallicans and not extinct even in the years of the War of the Spanish Succession, which is Giannone's ultimate preoccupation – and the colourful tales of his secret heresy are on the whole dismissed. There was cause to fear that he might reduce the church to its primitive poverty, and no doubt this is why monastic historians like Matthew Paris turned against him.[68] But the story that the blasphemous text *De tribus impostoribus* was written at his instigation draws the comment that probably no such book was written at all,[69] and reports that Frederick was an Epicurean who denied the soul's immortality are countered by details of his zeal in the persecution of Albigensians and the other heretics.[70] If Giannone was a *libertin* with a secret doctrine, he kept it secret in the *Istoria civile*, where the strongest hint of the emperor's heresy is conveyed by a quotation from Dante,[71] and Frederick II is never made to embody an illuminist empire in which matter and spirit become one.[72]

[68] *Ist. civ.*, II, p. 453 (book XVII, c. 4).
[69] *Ist. civ.*, II, p. 389 (book XVI, c. 4).
[70] *Ist. civ.*, pp. 454–6.
[71] *Ist. civ.*, p. 453.
[72] The possibility of such a reading is thought by some to emerge from Kantorowicz, 1931. See however the chapter on Frederick in Kantorowicz, 1957, pp. 97–142.

CHAPTER 3

Angevins, Spaniards and Gallicans: to the brink of Enlightenment

The coming of the Angevin dynasty – brought in by the popes to destroy the heirs of Frederick and exterminate their house and line – marks the beginning of the *regno di Napoli* as it was known to Giannone himself, and their history is recounted in both negative and positive terms. On the one hand, the Angevins, far more than the Normans, are papal feudatories, and their exposed position and doubtful legitimacy obliges them to rigorous support of the papacy even during the 'Babylonish captivity' in the Avignon period, and of the French-supported claimants during the Great Schism. The incessant jurisdictional aggression of the Roman Curia against the autonomy of the Neapolitan courts, and the kingdom itself, is doubled by the circumstances of the Angevin succession, as well as by the increasing turbulence and independence of the *baroni*, many of whom are Frenchmen brought in by the new dynasty. On the other hand, the Angevins – at least the first two or three generations of them – are great legislators and shapers of royal government. It is they who make Naples, for the first time, the capital and metropolis of the *regno*, adorning it with magnificent buildings that are often the seat of the royal courts through which they rule as effectively as the Norman Rogers ruled Sicily from Palermo, or of the faculties of the *studio generale* which makes the city the seat of a great legal culture.[73] Giannone reviews the chief schools of jurisprudence, glossatorial and post-glossatorial, of the fourteenth century, and the Thomist and Scotist schools of scholastic philosophy which are intimately connected with them. If he is not above following Dante in the tale that Thomas Aquinas was poisoned by order of Charles of Anjou,[74] and if in much later chapters he will welcome the triumph of the 'new philosophy' over scholastic sterility, his awareness that he is writing the history of a governing culture whose autonomy is perpetually at risk saves him from

[73] *Ist. civ.*, III (book XX, cc. 1, 2). [74] III, p. 6.

the Protestant and Enlightened arrogance of dismissing the centuries of Aristotelianism as a long night of intellectual barbarism. The scholastics of Naples – especially, perhaps, the more nominalist and Averroist among them – are allied with the civilians in creating the culture whose precarious glory forms the history he has to narrate.

The autonomy of Neapolitan history is if anything reinforced by the separation of Sicily from the Angevin kingdom, the next, and one might suppose catastrophic, *mutazione* in the history Giannone is writing.[75] Gibbon had his own perspective; when he came to write of the Sicilian Vespers sixty years later, he set the event in the context of the rise of the Palaeologi and the brief recovery of the Greek empire from the disaster of the Fourth Crusade.[76] Giannone was writing the civil history of the *regno di Napoli*, from which he had always – the Palermitan period excepted – thought of Sicily as set somewhat apart: *un'isola*, not indeed *in mezzo all'Oceano*, but unlike the peninsular provinces in lacking a Gothic or a Lombard phase in such legal history as it possessed. Feudal tenures were introduced by the Normans, but the substructure was Greek or Arab, and the complex interactions between Roman and feudal law evident in the legislation of Frederick Barbarossa did not take effect in Sicily. Giannone could therefore allow himself to regard the island as a world apart, *spiccato* (to borrow his own word) by laws and customs not those of the peninsula, and when it is established as a separate kingdom under Aragonese rulers the distinctive history of Neapolitan jurisprudence and intellectual culture is as much heightened as it is diminished. Sicily must await its own civil history; it is not Giannone's aim to provide it.

The consequences of the revolt of Sicily are therefore recounted in terms of dynastic history. After many changes of fortune – including a naval battle off Naples in which frogmen seem to have played a principal part[77] – the Aragonese dynasty keeps control of a Sicilian kingdom, and when the Angevin line fails, after the criminal antics of the house of Durazzo, the Two Sicilies are once more united in 1442 by the establishment of an Aragonese king on the throne of Naples. All these events are presented against the background of the vicissitudes of the fourteenth-century papacy and the French monarchy. It is Philip the Fair, rather than the emperor, who confronts the megalomaniac Boniface VIII and profits by the Avignon interlude and the Great Schism. The rulers of

[75] *Ist. civ.*, III (book X, c. 5).
[76] *Decline and Fall*, vol. VI, ch. 62; Womersley, III, pp. 756–8; Bury, VI, pp. 497–500.
[77] *Ist. civ.*, III, pp. 64–5 (book XX, c. 8).

Naples and Sicily are not strongly placed enough to play an independent part, and the effect of the Aragonese unification is to leave unsettled claims by the ruling house of France which become the matter of dispute between France and Spain after the epoch-making invasion by Charles VIII in 1494. The 'medieval' struggle between papacy and empire is replaced by the 'modern' conflict between Valois and Habsburg; but before this happens there is the end of another epoch for Giannone to record. For Gibbon the fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked the end of Roman empire and the term of his labours; but for the less universally – it would be an impertinence to say the more parochially – focused Giannone, the event was significant in two other ways. It brought Turkish imperial, and later Maghribi naval, power so close to the *regno* as to constitute a threat scarcely extinct in his own days, and by encouraging the emigration of Greek scholars it significantly altered the jurisprudence and philosophy which were at the centre of his history.

His unifying theme is the counterpoint between the Curia's aggressiveness in the field of jurisdiction, and the maintenance by the southern kings of a juristic structure and culture capable of meeting the challenge. The revival of humane letters, therefore – it is significant that he writes of it only after an earlier chapter which deals with the invention of printing[78] – presents itself as an important adjunct to the culture of jurisprudence. After he has told us what Lascaris and Chrysoloras and Trapezuntius did for the study of grammar, poetry and rhetoric, the emphasis is soon transferred to what we should call legal humanism, which revivifies the study of Roman law. Those there were, indeed, who became obsessed with philology,[79] either in order to imitate the ancients or to anatomise their style when it was no longer imitable; but we are a long way here from d'Alembert's downgrading of *érudition*. The criticism is rather that launched by the neo-Bartolist *mos italicus* against the uncompromising antiquarians of the *mos gallicus*,[80] and once it is acknowledged that minute historical study of the text can clarify the problems of applying the law under changed conditions, the great names of the *école de Bourges* – Cujas, Hotman, Baudouin – become the names of heroes. They renew the anti-curial efficacy of juristic scholarship, and only now does it become necessary to oppose the new humanism, to which a 'new philosophy' will be added, to the sterile abstractions of a scholasticism maintained by the church for its own purposes.

[78] *Ist. civ.*, III, pp. 427–43 (book XXVII, c. 4), 467–503 (book XXVIII, cc. 2(1).
[79] *Ist. civ.*, III, p.470. [80] Kelley, 1970; Gilmore, 1941.

The *mos gallicus* and the *ecclesia gallicana* are never far apart in Giannone's mind; the autonomy of history is the autonomy of jurisdiction.

In writing the history of the wars of 1494 to 1530 and the foundations of baroque Italy, Giannone was in some degree the Guicciardini, and the Sarpi, of the south; but he was neither a Florentine nor a Venetian, and did not have even the memory of a full civic independence behind him. The successive dynasties of the *regno* had done all they could to preserve juristic autonomy, but could never set it free from the papal threat. Ferdinand the Catholic and Gonzalvo de Cordoba, Charles V and the Duke of Alba, made good the Aragonese claim to the Two Sicilies; but what they established was not an independent kingdom, but two viceroyalties of the *monarchia hispanica*. Giannone does not make much of the 'universal empire' of Charles V to whom his patron Charles VI liked to see himself as a successor. As we have seen, he saw sovereignty as residing in the relations between kings and peoples; and even under the name of 'Caesar', each Charles was in his eyes less an isapostolic Constantine than the head of a multiple monarchy, in which the sovereignties of many kingdoms had happened to meet. But the *regno di Napoli* was not an independent but a dependent kingdom, governed by a deputy or viceroy, and its struggle against the unsleeping chicanery of Rome would henceforth be conducted by others, acting on its behalf but mindful of the interests of many including themselves, of which the freedom of Naples was only one feature. Giannone gives full measure to the treatment of how the Spanish rulers resisted attempts to impose papal bulls and the Roman Inquisition upon the *regno*, but has to add that Neapolitan resistance to the Spanish Inquisition was dependent on the good offices of Spanish viceroys. The theme of baroque history in his eyes was the various ways in which the rulers of Catholic Europe dealt with a papacy rendered newly aggressive by the Council of Trent and a church whose scholarship as well as scholasticism had been sharpened by the effort of Counter-Reformation. The multiplication of religious orders obedient directly to Rome – the Society of Jesus, needless to say, in particular – increased the opportunities of encroachment on temporal jurisdiction; and there is a passage in which Giannone compares the practices of the great kings in dealing with all these matters, and leaves no doubt that he prefers French confrontation to Spanish temporisation.

Queste erano le arti, e le cautele praticate dal Re Filippo, e da' suoi cauti Consiglieri Spagnuoli: si proccurava in apparenza tener soddisfatto il Pontefice,

con inorpellare, distreggiare, e come si poteva meglio lusingarlo, mostrando tutta la riverenza, e rispetto alla sua Sede, ed alla sua persona, ma nell'interno non si volevano pregiudicar le loro regalie. All'incontro i Francesi, alla scoverta rifiutarono que' Canoni, non vollero accettargli, ed a'mali nascenti accorrevano tosto col ferro, e col fuoco per estirpargli. Quindi è, che saviamente disse quell'insigne Archivescovo di Parigi Pietro di Marca, che queste piaghe gli Spagnuoli proccuravano sanarle con ungenti, e con impiastri, ma i Francesi con ferro, e con fuoco: medicamenti assai più efficaci, e propri per la total estirpazione del male, essendosi veduto con isperienza non tanto in Ispagna, quanto nel nostro Regno di Napoli, ch'essendosi, secondo queste massime degli Spagnuoli voluto accorrere a medicare le continue piaghe, e ferite, che riceve la regal giurisdizione, con tali impiastri, ed unguenti, le controversie, sè per qualche tempo rimanevan sopite, non eran però estinte; anzi essendo gli Ecclesiastici sempre accorti, e vigilanti, le facevano risorgere in tempi per essi più opportuni, ne' quali sovente ci mancava, non pur il ferro, ed il fuoco, ma anche l'impiastro; onde quasi sempre facevano delle scappate sopra la potestà temporale de'nostri Principi. Quindi è, che Giovanni Bodino chiamava i Re di Spagna, *Servi obsequentissime de' Romani Pontefici.*[81]

[These were the Artifices and Cautions made use of by King Philip and his wary Spanish Counsellors; they got the Pope seemingly to be satisfied, by soothing him up, and managing him with Dexterity, shewing at the same Time all Respect and regard both to the Holy See and his Person, but they took Care to preserve the Regalia and their own Privileges untouched: On the contrary, the French openly rejected those Canons, and had immediately recourse to Fire and Sword for crushing those growing Mischiefs. Whence that famous Archbishop of Paris, Peter de Marca, took Occasion to say, that the Spaniards had cured these Wounds with Plaisters and Ointments, but the French with Fire and Sword; Medicines much more effectual and proper for intirely rooting out the Distemper, it having been found by Experience, not only in Spain, but in our Kingdom of Naples, that, according to these Spanish Maxims, by endeavouring to cure those continual Wounds and Blows which the Royal Jurisdiction received by such Plaisters and Ointments, tho' the Controversies lay dormant for a while, yet they were not quite extinguished: On the contrary, the Ecclesiasticks being always vigilant and cunning, revived them whenever they found a favourable Opportunity, when not only Fire and Sword, but even the Plaisters could not be applied; whereupon they seldom failed to break in upon the Temporal Authority of our Princes. Whence John Bodin calls the Kings of Spain, most obsequious Servants of the Roman Pontiffs.][82]

It is a further consequence of the *regno's* provincial status that the history of jurisdiction, which has been the thread guiding Giannone's narrative since its remote classical beginnings, is almost at an end. With very few exceptions, his account of each viceroy closes with a list of the

[81] *Ist. civ.*, IV, pp. 174–5 (book XXXIII, c. 3, section 1). [82] Ogilvie, II, p. 619.

buoni e savi leggi each left behind him; but they are not sovereign legislators and are not erecting the jurisdictional structure of an independently growing kingdom. There is a perceptible turn away from the subject of legislation to that of *police* – under baroque and enlightened conditions the increasingly fascinating subject of the governing and good order of cities. Pedro de Toledo, one of the earliest and greatest of the Spanish viceroys, pulls down porticos and drives streets through tangled alleys, to discourage the lurking of footpads; he demolishes an entire cliff because it is honeycombed with caves, in which the dissolute gather to commit *orribili disonestà*; he imposes a penalty of instant death on anyone caught in the streets of Naples after dark with a ladder, whether of wood or of rope – there having apparently been so many imputations against the honour of young ladies as to throw the marriage market among the urban nobility into crisis.[83] These laudable measures point towards an increasingly polite and enlightened age; they are part of what Enlightenment thinkers called *l'état policé*; but not of what King James of Great Britain called 'the true law of free monarchies'. They do not fortify the temporal against the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and they make the history of Naples merely municipal. Giannone did not quite trust the Spanish monarchy to defend the *regno* against the *stato pontificiale.*

Under these conditions there are signs of an emphasis on what the independent intellect of the south may be able to do for itself, unaided by the public structures of authority. Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella[84] – southerners both, the one burned and the other imprisoned – are indeed mentioned as wild men whose activities (in Campanella's case conspiracy)[85] got new thought a bad name. But there is reference also to more sober and far-reaching enquiries, carried out at the university though not by its enthroned faculties, when Francesco d'Andrea brings in the juristic methods of Cujas and Tommaso Cornelio the philosophy of Descartes.[86] A Cartesian period of revolutionary importance is now presupposed by historians of Neapolitan Enlightenment, though Giannone is of the opinion that the 'new philosophy' was pioneered by Gassendists – Pierre Gassendi having promoted the study of Epicurus and Lucretius by Christians – and Cartesian only by a later development.[87] This is to walk on dangerous ground, and he does not

[83] *Ist. civ.*, IV, pp. 47–50 (book XXXII, c. 1). [84] *Ist. civ.*, IV, pp. 295–6 (book XXIV, c. 8 (1)).
[85] This episode receives a chapter to itself (lib. XXXV, c. 1).
[86] *Ist. civ.*, IV, pp. 420–3 (book XXXVIII, c. 4 (1)), 484–92 (book XL, c. 5). For d'Andrea see Mastellone, 1969. [87] *Ist. civ.*, IV, p. 114 (book XXXII, c. 5 (3)).

say very much about it. The intellectual history of late Spanish Naples is sketched against a background of the monarchy's universal decay, and the *Istoria civile* itself concludes with the death of Charles II in 1700. This is a moment big with calamities for the *regno*, from which it is foretold the end of Spanish and the beginning of Austrian rule will bring deliverance. But Charles VI can still rule Naples as only one of his provinces, and Giannone might have understood why Franco Venturi chose to include the kingdom in the history of *settecento riformatore* only from the establishment of a separate Bourbon dynasty in 1734, eleven years after the *Istoria civile* was published.

CHAPTER 4

Gibbon and Giannone: narrative, philosophy, erudition

The *Istoria civile* is thus a narrative, or a macronarrative, recounting successive stages through which the imperfect sovereignty of the *regno di Napoli* has passed since its beginnings. The adversary before Giannone's eye was the universal power of the papacy, an adversary ultimately alien to civil society because founded on spiritual claims he did not accept, but more immediately legalist and jurisdictional in character, and therefore to be met on ground it had chosen by argument on behalf of civil sovereignty and civil society. What converted Giannone's argument from a brief into a history was his capacity to narrate the successive, partly successful, attempts of *le nostre provincie* to construct systems of jurisdiction and legislation which should erect them into a *regno di Napoli* and a functioning because autonomous civil society. Here, it might seem, we have one of those 'Enlightenments in national context' which Europhile historians so much mistrust;[181] but – apart from his conviction that the *regno* had never won its battle for the autonomy of the civil power – there are two sets of reasons why Giannone saw the national and the cosmopolitan as interacting rather than in opposition. The first was his perception that, though Neapolitan sovereignty could be based only on the consent of Neapolitan civil society, the *regno* had as often as not been ruled not by sovereigns of its own making, but as a province of some larger empire – Byzantine, Hohenstaufen, Spanish, Habsburg. Its history was therefore inseparable from the histories of empire, including the papal, and must be written in a context larger than itself. In the hands of other exponents of the 'Enlightened narrative' – but only marginally in the case of Giannone – this history would culminate in the conversion of 'Christendom' into 'Europe', a commonwealth of independent states, in each of which civil society had become strong enough to exercise autonomy. 'Europe' was a construction in which the national

[181] Porter and Teich, 1981; Robertson, 1997b; O'Brien, 1997.

and the cosmopolitan reinforced one another in maintaining the universality of civil society against the false universality of the spiritual power.

In the second place, Giannone saw Neapolitan history in terms of competition between two universal systems, the canon law and the civil. He specifically denied that the kingdom had generated its own law out of its own substance (as the English, he may have known, claimed had been the case with them) and adverted rather to the problem raised by Arthur Duck; that of how the civil law had come to assume different shapes in different kingdoms. (The need to include feudal law among the *novellae* led to a differentiation between the two Sicilies making up the *regno*.) In part because Neapolitan history had never exercised the power to make itself, the macronarrative of the successive states through which the kingdom had passed became a narrative of successive states of jurisprudence, both practical and theoretical, either imposed on the kingdom by distant emperors or manufactured within it in the search for autonomy. And because Giannone saw civil law as the key to civil society, the successive states of jurisprudence making up his narrative are successive states of legal culture. He begins, though he certainly does not follow up, the Enlightened move from laws to manners and *police* as providing the fabric of civil society.

Giannone thus emerges as a proto-Enlightened historian, nearer the baroque than the rococo, the inhabitant of a world of civil law and government rather than of manners and philosophy. This distinction, though important, is not central to the question of how his narrative was composed or of what other exponents of the 'Enlightened narrative', including Gibbon, may have learned from him. In the case of Gibbon and the *Decline and Fall*, it is a major fact that both histories – unlike the others to be studied in this volume – commence their narratives in late antiquity, in Giannone's case with the successive reorganisations of Roman rule in the prefectures, dioceses and provinces south of Rome itself. Gibbon in 1764, if he thought of Giannone at all on his journey to Rome and briefly on to Naples, would have equated this part of the *Istoria civile's* narrative with Cluverius and his then predominant interest in the erudite reconstruction of the administrative and logistic structure of Roman empire in Italy.[89] But we have to presume that in Rome in 1764, or at some point not long after, something began the transformation of this project into what became the *Decline and Fall*, and the *Istoria civile* seems both negatively and positively related to this process.

[89] *EEG*, pp. 266–9.

Giannone's enquiry carries him to a threshold which he did not cross, but Gibbon did, in developing a retrospect of the decline of the principate as a consequence of the decline of the Roman republic. Gibbon's mind worked in Tacitean and Montesquieuan patterns, towards a history of virtue and its corruption; but Giannone was never other than a jurist and civilian, and the structures of civil law were structures of imperial and princely authority. He remained therefore a historian of empire, but not as we have seen an imperialist in the sense of a Ghibelline historian; while Gibbon, a historian of empire to the end, remained aware that there were forms of government, and of liberty, other than the Caesarian, which had been possible. The two fall into step, however, when their narratives relate how the decline of empire, of Rome's empire in Italy, provided the frame in which the rise of ecclesiastical power had been possible. The structures of urban life and administration, they agreed, were taken over by ecclesiastics as imperial and civil authority failed; and this was one way of seeing how there came to be friars on the Capitol, how the church functioned as the ghost of the empire. This narrative had a macro-political dimension. The disastrous intervention of Justinian and his generals had produced a power vacuum in Italy, in which Byzantine, Lombard, papal and Frankish power had competed to the ultimate extinction of the two first and the triumph of the two latter. Giannone and Gibbon studied this series of crises, emphasising how the popes allied themselves, against the iconoclast emperors, with the cultic popular religion which Christianity was becoming in Italy; but there is a paradoxical dynamism, lacking in Giannone, when Gibbon explains how the popes, while remaining the steadfast authors of the aggression of ecclesiastical against civil authority, nevertheless became the unworthy protectors of Italian liberty against Byzantine or Hohenstaufen empire. 'The Guelfs', he once wrote, 'displayed the banner of liberty and the church',[90] and with all its irony, the sentence is one which Giannone could never have written.

There is a philosophical as well as a historiographical dimension to the gap opening up between the two men. Giannone himself proceeded to explore the philosophical implications called forth by the history he had written, and it is of some importance to consider what these were and to ask what Gibbon might have thought of them. He was driven from Naples as a consequence of having published the *Istoria civile*, and

[90] *Decline and Fall*, vol. v, ch. 49; Womersley, III, p. 144; Bury, v, p. 324.

for some time found himself at Vienna, in a climate still much affected by the lately deceased John Toland and by the groups of Spinozistic freethinkers who had collected around Prince Eugene. Here he began writing the *Triregno*,[91] a work which played much part in his subsequent arrest and the writing in prison with which he ended his days; he had entered a world a good deal closer to Bruno and Campanella than he had admitted to finding congenial in the *Istoria civile*. The *Triregno* recognises the presence in history of a *regno terreno*, a *regno celeste* and a *regno papale*, all three *regni* being in fact expressions of religion. The *regno terreno* is that of primeval humans wandering the earth after the Flood; these worshipped the sky above them and the earth which it encompassed, and had no sense of the soul as an immortal substance differing from the material universe. Their worship was enough to engender an awareness of natural morality; but it is evident that Giannone was walking a very narrow line between theism and non-theism, between a sky-god deism which recognised that in Heaven there was a Lord (in *T'ien* a *T'ien-c'hu*)[92] who had made all things, and a Spinozistic pantheism which drew no distinction between God and the universe, holding the two to be of one substance (or *ch'i*). His suggestion that the primitive gentiles had known nothing of the soul ascribed to them a materialism which could be made to sustain the latter. The *regno celeste* appeared with the advent of Jesus, who taught the soul's immortality; it was a kingdom of departed spirits, who were rewarded with God's presence or punished by his absence, according as they had listened to Jesus's teaching and/or observed the natural morality which he taught also. This was to say little about Jesus himself, about who or what he had been: a divine being, a prophet sent by God and so divine in mission but not in nature, or a philosopher who had arrived of himself at a knowledge of the soul and its future? Giannone was liable to be asked his position; did he perhaps think of Jesus as a benign impostor who had reinforced his message by pretended miracles?

As for the *regno papale*, it was Hobbes's kingdom of darkness: a series of devices by which priests in general, and the bishop of Rome in particular, had attributed to Christ a divine substance which he did not possess, in order to claim that they themselves had received a share of it from him and exercised authority, extending to jurisdiction, by virtue of it. Every enemy of Catholic or papal claims made this charge in one way or another; the question was how far it could be pressed without destroying

[91] This work is available in part in Bertelli and Ricuperati, pp. 581–730. For the intellectual milieu of Vienna, see Ricuperati, 'Nota introduttiva', *ibid.*, pp. 581–92. [92] *EEG*, p. 166.

the entire substance of a faith based on the divinity of Jesus. It was what Giannone had to say about the *regni terreno e celeste* that would make known how far he was prepared to go, and the *Triregno* was not published in his lifetime.[93] He wrote another manuscript, an *Apologia de' teologi scolastici*,[94] which excuses the latter on the grounds that it was not they but the Fathers of the Church themselves who had introduced confusion into Christian belief. Jean Barbeyrac attempted something similar in a treatise *De la morale des Pères*,[95] and it was very easy to suggest that Jesus taught nothing but morality and that all accounts of his divinity, incarnation, miracles and resurrection were subsequent inventions.

It is unlikely that Gibbon knew of the *Triregno*, but the work is one of several which were mooted or at least talked about on the libertine and clandestine margins of Enlightenment; another, promoted without success by Diderot, was being discussed when Gibbon was in Paris in 1763.[96] They combined a strongly anti-sacerdotal history of religion as priestcraft with projects for a civil religion of a markedly Spinozistic and Tolandist character, and Giannone had been led in this direction by meditating on the kind of religion which would be compatible with his understanding of the human mind in civil history. His scheme, and his religion, are at some distance from the Voltairean deism to be encountered in the next set of chapters, and we may wish to ask also whether they lie at all close to Gibbon's intentions when, in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the *Decline and Fall*, he entered on a critique of Christianity so far-reaching as to incur the charge that he was a 'deist' who aimed to destroy that religion altogether. In the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, Gibbon had moved from what seems to indicate a fairly conventional account of the rise and spread of Christianity to what looks like the beginnings of a natural history of religion; and it is fair to ask whether there was taking shape anything like the projects of Giannone or Diderot.

In a valuable essay on 'Gibbon and Giannone',[97] John Robertson has shown that the latter's commitment to the Austrian succession in Naples led him to attack Bourbon pretensions, which were ultimately rooted in the Angevin enterprise of the thirteenth century – as had been those of

[93] His *Opere postume* appeared in Naples in 1768. A work of this title appears dated 'Lausanne, 1760', in *Library*, p. 133, but cannot have included any part of the *Triregno*. I am indebted to Professor Ricuperati for help on this point. See further Imbruglia, 1996, pp. 67–8, and 1997, pp. 81–2.
[94] Bertelli and Ricuperati, pp. 791–914. [95] Gibbon read it at Lausanne; *Journal B*, p. 120.
[96] Imbruglia, 1997, pp. 83–9. [97] Womersley (ed.), 1997, pp. 3–20.

Charles VIII in 1494 – and had papal authority behind them. This is a practical setting in which much of the *Istoria civile* may be read. Gibbon had no Angevin or Hohenstaufen commitments, and while the thrust of his undertaking was towards regarding the papal claims to authority as the key to the history of the Latin middle ages, this was a history he determined not to write. It appears, in the later volumes of the *Decline and Fall*, in a marginal relation with the history of the eastern empire – a margin, however, which constantly threatens to take over the centre, for the reason that Gibbon understood it better. On the one hand, therefore, the Sicilian Vespers – that great revenge of insular if not peninsular Sicily upon Angevin ruthlessness – which appears in Giannone as the prelude to Aragonese rule, is treated by Gibbon in the setting of the Palaeologus restoration of Greek authority over the Latin empire of Constantinople.[98] On the other hand, Gibbon's treatment of Frederick II is as we have seen somewhat cursory, and he pays greater attention to Frederick Barbarossa in a context not identical with Giannone's. Gibbon was a north-west European and a Protestant, living in a world dominated by the French and British monarchies; in studying the Hohenstaufen empire which had been replaced by the former, he needed to view it in its Suabian and Lombard aspects and not exclusively in its Neapolitan. The *istoria civile del regno* lost the centrality it had possessed for him at earlier stages of the story, and two historiographic consequences are to be noted.

As his attention moves from south to north in the Italian peninsula, it moves from Giannone to Muratori and Maffei.[99] These scholars, situated in Modena and Verona, enabled him to see Italian history in its Cisalpine and Tuscan settings. They were not historians but antiquarians, collectors of documents rather than narrators of histories; and this is a point at which we re-enter the world of erudition, on levels other than Giannone's juristic and ecclesiastical learning. However, many of the works they edited were themselves histories – the *scriptores rerum italicarum*, as Muratori put it – and Gibbon could claim to have read medieval Italian history in the language of the originals rather than the moderns.[100] A macrohistory or histories therefore emerged from his studies in erudition, and much of it was that of the interplay between imperial and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. There was a third component,

[98] *Decline and Fall*, vol. VI, ch. 52; Womersley, III, pp. 756–9; Bury, VI, pp. 497–500.
[99] Robertson, in Womersley (ed.), 1997, pp. 14–15, 18–19; *Memoirs*, p. 147. For Muratori's and Maffei's roles in the *settecento riformatore*, see Venturi, 1969, pp. 153–60 and *passim*.
[100] *Decline and Fall*, vol. VI, ch. 69, n. 12; Womersley, III, p. 984; Bury, VII, p. 226.

however, not to be met with on a comparable scale in Giannone: that of the jurisdiction and autonomy exercised by powerful and less powerful city republics; and there the grand theme of the relation between civil and ecclesiastical authority took a complicating turn. Gibbon, says John Robertson very rightly, was to the end a historian of empire,[101] and it was the decline of empire which had made way for the church. But the empire and its decline themselves originated in the fall of a republic, and what was replacing the Christian millennium was a republic of states, not a new empire. When Gibbon inspected the medieval history of empire, he found that liberty – as important a component of civil society as sovereignty – had been maintained by the struggles of Italian cities, Swiss cantons, and Netherlands provinces against the Hohenstaufen and the Habsburgs, and that while the wars of papacy and empire had lasted, liberty, like that of the Guelfs in the quotation above,[102] had not infrequently been upheld by the church. A Guelfic element now and then surfaces in the *Decline and Fall*, and may lie behind his unfulfilled plan for a history of the house of Brunswick, from its Guelf and Este beginnings to its Hanoverian present;[103] it has bearings, too, on his understanding of the natural history of religion. He did not learn this from Giannone, and it is imaginable that, had he known of the *Triregno*, he would have left it behind as belonging in the age of the Isaurians and the Iconoclasts. There is a link, then, between his pursuit of north Italian erudition rather than southern narrative and the greatest of his ironies: the discovery that the popes had been the friends of liberty as well as its enemies.

[101] See Womersley (ed.), 1997, pp. 15–16. [102] See n. 90.
[103] *Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, in *English Essays*, pp. 398–531. Gibbon intended to rely on Leibniz for German history, Muratori for Italian.

SECTION II

Voltaire: neo-classicist and *philosophe* in the Enlightened world-picture

CHAPTER 5

On the horizons of Europe: the kings of the north

Gibbon's knowledge of Voltaire as historian, like his knowledge of Giannone, dates from his early years at Lausanne, when an *abrégé* of the former's *histoire universelle* figures among the notes he began taking as a self-training in erudition.[1] It is true that Voltaire is not depicted as a historian when Gibbon's memoirs describe his youthful visits to Les Délices,[2] and that he first appears in that role when the militia journal reminds its author to amuse himself with the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, and subsequently contains a critique of that work in terms much less condescending.[3] In a broader perspective, however, to turn from Giannone's *oeuvre* to the totality of Voltaire's histories is to take a crucial step in the understanding of the 'Enlightened narrative'. It is to turn from *giurisdizionalismo* to *philosophie*, for where the *Istoria civile* is concerned with conflict and change among systems of civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction – not, certainly, without their cultural, philosophical and in the end theological implications – the centrepiece of Voltaire's historiography is an *essai sur les moeurs*, and *moeurs* constitute a philosophical and an Enlightened concept. That is to say, in moving from laws to manners we follow the *philosophe* rejection of the thought-patterns of the older clerisies – those engrossed with *la loi*, *la foi* and *la langue* – and the decision to present sociability as a totality of ways of living (*moeurs*, manners, politeness) capable of being substituted for the long struggle between the secular and the spiritual. This was what *philosophie* very often meant, whether or not it concerned itself (as it often did) with

[1] British Library Additional MSS. 34880, fols. 41v, 54v; *YEG*, pp. 75, 320. The references are to the *Abrégé de l'histoire universelle*, published in London in 1753. [2] *Memoirs*, pp. 82–4.
[3] *Journal A*, pp. 122–3, 129–30.

establishing an infrastructure of 'philosophy' in our sense of the word.

Philosophie, while always distinguishable from historical grand narrative, required and generated such a narrative of its own. In placing *les moeurs* at the centre of Voltaire's historiography, we recognise that he was constructing a narrative of a new kind, which may be termed Enlightened; and in so far as the connecting theme of this narrative is the subjection of *les moeurs* to barbarism and religion, followed after many centuries by their emancipation from both, we recognise 'the Enlightened narrative', which both defines Enlightenment and finds its telos in it. Certainly, Voltaire's vocabulary does not hypostasise 'Enlightenment'; he does not say much about *les lumières*, less still about *l'illuminisme*, and is not among those who have abstracted and reified 'The Enlightenment' by prefixing the definite article in the various languages of Europe.[4] He does, however, vigorously and intentionally describe a historical phenomenon, or series of phenomena, in language visibly continuous with that we use in speaking of '(The) Enlightenment'; the metaphor of light is present in his writings; and in the *Siècle de Louis XIV* – which is the foundational block of his histories as the *Essai sur les moeurs* is their centrepiece – we may say that he gives us his account of what 'Enlightenment' essentially was and how it happened: the achievement of the civilising monarchy of a great, if flawed, French king. Whether all European historians would accept this proposition is of less immediate significance than the fact that they were now confronted with it.

Voltaire, then, both defines 'Enlightenment' and presents 'the Enlightened narrative' in terms of a history of manners, attempted on a scale and with a panache not found before him; and this is not a final definition of his achievement. His history of manners and Enlightenment is at the same time a history of 'Europe', marked both by hatred of what 'Europe' has been and still is, in the age of barbarism and religion, and by sceptical hope for what it may become in an age of enlightenment; we begin to find that self-hatred is an aspect of Eurocentrism and does not necessarily mitigate it. At the same time, the substitution of 'Europe' for 'Christendom' – which is entailed by Voltaire's planned substitution of *histoire générale* for Bossuet's *histoire universelle* – calls for consideration of what 'Europe' is; and here we shall find, as Gibbon did, that Voltaire's histories are concerned in the expansion of 'Europe' into new historical contexts, which further question its own history without

[4] 'The Enlightenment', 'l'illuminismo', 'la ilustración', 'die Aufklärung', etc.

diminishing its global hegemony. This expansion follows three routes: the extension through Eurasia of the Russian state before and after Peter the Great, entailing the question whether or not Peter and his Russia form an agency of Enlightenment; the concomitant encounter of the Jesuit order, whom Voltaire both detested and admired, with the great anti-Europe of Confucian China; and the oceanic, American and global expansion of the maritime peoples of western Europe, among whom the French and British were now in planetary rivalry. A new kind of global historiography was beginning to appear – usually imperialist, usually orientalist, but never finally defined by either set of characteristics – and there are bridges leading from the *Essai sur les moeurs* (1756–62) to Joseph de Guignes's *Histoire des Huns, Turcs et Mogols* (1756), to Raynal's *Histoire des . . . Européens dans les Deux Indes* (1770–80), and to the later volumes of the *Decline and Fall* (1781–8). Voltaire planned to move out from Europe and return to it, Gibbon to move out from the city of Rome and return to it; both reached the borders of China. We need to understand what took them there.

Voltaire's adventure in space and time needs to be set against his trajectory among the three modes of Momiglianan historiography. It is of course crucial that he disdained becoming an *érudit*, since nothing created a greater revulsion in Gibbon's mind against the *philosophe* style of writing history; but just what Voltaire's refusal meant, and just how far it paralleled that of d'Alembert to which Gibbon had taken exception, are questions to be considered. It is also important to realise that both his history of Enlightenment – to some extent even his definition of it – and his history of the expansion of Europe grew out of history which he wrote in an older, neo-classical and narrative mode: the history of great kings and their actions, written in a style of courtly and panegyric history which Voltaire retained and transformed even as he repudiated it. This dimension is crucial to the construction of his grand narrative; there are links between the *historiographe du roi* and the *historien philosophique*; and to begin the understanding of this we must proceed to a chronology of Voltaire's historical works and consider the *oeuvre* which they constitute.

This has been supplied by René Pomeau and others.[5] Voltaire began composing the *Histoire de Charles XII* in 1727 and published a first edition (suppressed by the police) in 1731. He began work on the *Siècle de Louis XIV* in the following year, but did not complete or publish it for nearly

[5] Pomeau, *OH*, *EM*; Brumfitt, 1958.

two decades, in 1751; d'Alembert saluted it in his introduction to the *Encyclopédie* in the same year. He began the work which was to become the *Essai sur les moeurs* in 1741, and a history of the War of the Austrian Succession, 'la guerre de 1741', in 1745; in 1756 he published an *Histoire générale depuis Charlemagne à nos jours*, which is a conflation of the *Essai* and the *Siècle*. Since 1737–8 he had been interested in the figure of Peter the Great, and his *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand* was composed in 1757–60 and published in 1760 and 1762. A new edition of the *Essai sur les moeurs* appeared in the latter year, and in 1765 *La philosophie de l'histoire*, which became the introduction to the final text of the *Essai* in 1768 and the *Siècle* in 1769.[6] In this year appeared a *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*, Voltaire's last major historical work, though an *Histoire de l'établissement du Christianisme* appeared after his death in 1778.[7]

Gibbon possessed the 1752 edition of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, a 1756 English translation of the *Guerre de 1741*, and two collections of Voltaire's *oeuvres complètes* (Geneva, 1768–77, and Lausanne, 1780–1), in which the *Essai sur les moeurs* was included in the *Histoire générale*.[8] The *Essai sur les moeurs* was planned to culminate in the already written *Siècle de Louis XIV*, and was written concurrently with the *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*; the three works must be taken as presenting Voltaire's vision of history on the scale which Gibbon was to rival. For this reason they may be read together, and need not always be considered in the order of their composition.

We premise, then, that the *Essai sur les moeurs* – a survey of history since Charlemagne, and a critical and philosophical enquiry on the same scale as the *Istoria civile del Regno di Napoli* and the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* – cannot be viewed apart from Voltaire's other major works of history, and that these take the form of histories of great kings: Charles XII, Peter I and Louis XIV. We are not to take uncritically, therefore, Voltaire's repeated dismissals of 'kings-and-battles' history as unworthy of the philosopher's attention. He wrote the histories of kings and paid close attention to their battles; these powerfully presented works, moreover, are still *miroirs des princes*, presented for the instruction and amusement of kings and their well-informed subjects, and furnishing them with lessons on what to imitate and to avoid. Voltaire was an admirer of enlightened absolutism, who repudiated angrily the equation of absolute monarchy with despotism; he knew that modern absolute monarchy – especially in the hands of Louis XIV, its greatest exponent –

[6] Brumfitt (ed.), 1969. [7] 'Chronologie de Voltaire', *OH*, pp. 25–35.
[8] *Library*, p. 279; Womersley, III, pp. 1272–3.

was among other things a neo-classical art-form, and that neo-classical historiography was both its expression and its instrument. He therefore wrote neo-classical histories as an exponent of a *thèse royale*, and if this did not prevent him from criticising the conduct of the kings (even Louis) whom he portrayed, we are to remember that the *historiographe* was in his way a *conseiller du roi* and that it might be the counsellor's duty to tell his sovereign unpalatable truths and make them known to posterity. Nor was it new, to either the classical or the humanist historian, that a great king might be a legislator as well as a conqueror; Voltaire trod in both paths when composing histories of two rulers, Louis XIV and Peter I, who had been legislators, and one, Charles XII, who by way of contrast had not. To legislate was to do more than perform deeds worthy of emulation; it was to transform the lives of the subjects for the better; and it is true that Louis and Peter brought about not only civil order but what is meant by Enlightenment. The *Essai sur les moeurs* becomes a work of Enlightenment in an advanced sense when it makes the claim that the history which needs to be written is that of *les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*; but it may still be the great king who transforms *moeurs* and *esprit*, and the *Essai* is presented as a prelude to the *Siècle de Louis XIV*. We find, furthermore, that the perfection of neo-classical art-forms was central and indispensable to Voltaire's conception of Enlightenment; and since historiography was one of these art-forms, he continued to write neo-classical histories. In this sense, then, the *Essai* is not a rejection of grand courtly history, and Voltaire was in his own way one of Orest Ranum's 'artisans of glory'.[9]

This was not an uncritical branch of historiography, since there were criteria for determining what *la gloire* was and was not. There had been a dimension of politics and statecraft in classical historiography since its beginnings, and the ruler's glory was supposed to serve the good of the society of which he was the head. The *Histoire de Charles XII*, which stands first in the order of Voltaire's histories, calls to be read as a counter-example or antitype, introducing by way of contrast the greater themes which are to follow it. The Swedish king is presented as a hero and nothing else, a conqueror whose conquests have no meaning, a figure contrasted with that of his adversary Tsar Peter, who is both a conqueror and a legislator. Charles, interested only in war – not even (the court historian notes) in women – is led on to one desperate exploit after another by nothing but the demands of his own personality; this makes

[9] Ranum, 1980.

him an incredibly dangerous enemy, but in the end destroys his army when his decisions in the campaign of 1708–9 become wholly irrational. He turns away from even the dangerous objective of Moscow when he might well have reached it, and throws himself into the heart of Ukraine in search of an alliance with the Dnieper Cossacks.[10] The moves by which Charles is led to this fatal step are examined with the Thucydidean and Tacitean rigour appropriate to the mystery of a deeply irrational decision. His army is destroyed at Poltava, in a battle narrated in great detail, and he embarks on his hairbreadth (and hare-brained) adventures as a refugee and prisoner of state in Turkish Rumelia. These, Voltaire later remarks, were 'plus dignes d'un héros de l'Arioste que d'un roi sage'.[11] Charles, defending a farmhouse with a few companions against a force of janissaries puzzled to imagine what he thinks he is doing, is likely to put the modern reader in mind of Errol Flynn. Heroism in complete self-isolation transgresses the borders of the absurd.

Because Charles's driven personality carries him beyond the world which Voltaire and his readers thought familiar and civilised, he is bound to recall Alexander; but he lacks the Macedonian's imaginative capacity to found cities and alter the course of cultural history. That Voltaire reserves the comparison for Peter[12] shows that he is not an anti-heroic writer so much as a critic of heroism according to its own criteria; the true hero is more than the sum of his exploits. Charles is isolated even from the history of his own kingdom; the *Histoire de Charles XII* never becomes an *histoire de la Suède*, in which Pufendorf[13] or his successors might analyse Swedish national interests, and enquire what it was in the *stormaktstid* that carried Swedish armies so deep into Germany, Russia and Poland and might even account for the appearance of such *outré* personalities as Charles XII and his predecessor Christina. Sweden is not the Macedon of Europe, but there is a sense in which it helps shape the pattern, and makes the *Histoire de Charles XII* something more than a mirror in which to behold the fall of princes. Not only is the portrait of the conqueror Charles intended as a contrast to that of the legislator and conqueror Peter; Voltaire's first king-history introduces an extension of the horizon of history itself, to include a new area not previously included within it. We encounter, not for the first or the last time, the geography of Enlightenment.

[10] This is the theme of the first part of book IV of the *Histoire de Charles XII*; *OH*, pp. 147–61.
[11] *Histoire de la Russie*, ch. 19; *OH*, p. 473. [12] *OH*, pp. 143–4, 588–9.
[13] Charles is supposed to have been put to read Pufendorf as a child (*OH*, p. 62). See Pufendorf, 1695.

Voltaire calls this area *le nord*, and says more than once that even in the late seventeenth century it was not fully integrated in the political system of '*l'Europe*'.[14] Sweden had of course been part of 'European' power politics since the days of Richelieu and Gustavus Adolphus, and the control of the Sounds and the Belt had made it part of the commercial politics of the Dutch and English; but the Muscovite Time of Troubles and the adventures of Charles XII made it an actor in quite another history, and *le nord* in Voltaire's usage includes the Scandinavian peninsula, the Baltic Sea and beyond it the Russian state and the vast distances of Siberia and the Pontic steppe. The Prussian kingdom could have been included, and when Gibbon wrote 'a Julian, or Semiramis, may reign in the north',[15] Julian is probably Frederick the Great; but Voltaire never wrote a history of Prussia (he and Frederick knew too much about each other to permit that). The crucial presence making up *le nord* is the Russian state, and Peter's greatness as a legislator is that he makes his people, instead of barbarous, Enlightened; not in the philosophic sense, but capable of taking part in the European republic of commercial states which has succeeded the wars of religion and the phantom of universal monarchy. (As an admirer of Louis XIV, Voltaire is inclined to deny that it was ever more than a phantom.)

To make Russia in this sense part of 'Europe' is of course to transcend the concept of *le nord* itself, and to extend the concept of 'Europe' into enormous regions not previously, and not always today, thought of as belonging to it.[16] The Muscovite principality has already expanded through Siberia to the Pacific. The involvement of the modernised Russian state in the effects of the Ottoman decline carries it towards the Black Sea and the Balkans, and leads Peter to the one great failure of his reign, the disastrous campaign on the Pruth in 1711 which brought him close to being a prisoner of the Turks like Charles himself a few years before. This episode receives detailed treatment in the *Histoire de Charles XII*; we hear much of the role of Peter's consort Catherine, who took a leading hand in the negotiations with the Turks that ultimately delivered him.[17] Voltaire, who wrote much of his histories while in part-

[14] E.g., *EM*, IV, pp. 278–80.

[15] *Decline and Fall*, vol. III, ch. 38 ('General Observations'); Womersley, II, p. 513; Bury, IV, p. 178. Semiramis is usually taken to be Catherine II, but Voltaire (*OH*, p. 59) calls the fifteenth-century Queen Margaret of Denmark 'la Sémiramis du Nord'. There are many muted echoes of Voltaire in Gibbon's writings; this may be one of them.

[16] Wolff, 1994.

[17] *Histoire de Charles XII*, book V; *OH*, pp. 193–4; *Histoire de la Russie*, book II, ch. I; *OH*, pp. 484, 490–1.

nership with Emilie du Chatelet, had no aversion to pointing up the role of strong women in the history of statecraft. It is in the *Histoire de la Russie*, however, that we understand fully the significance of the treaty signed on the Pruth; it marked the failure of Peter's attempt to make Russia dominant in the commerce of the Black Sea.[18] He builds St Petersburg; his canals link the great rivers with the Baltic; but the strategy of integrating Russia with the commerce of an enlarged Europe is not rounded out by control of the trade of the Levant. Voltaire, who tends to present the Turks as not unreasonable people, is not necessarily envisaging some grandiose conquest of Constantinople. Commerce, even when opened up by war, is a benign force which may substitute itself for conquest.

The treaty of 1711 marking Peter's failure on the Pruth does not annul the importance of the treaty signed in 1689, at Nerchinsk on the Amur river, between emissaries of the tsar and the K'ang-hsi emperor. This contact with China marks the furthest extension of the Russian state and its modernising policies. Voltaire recognises the importance of these conquests to the history of Europe, but does not talk of a 'Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals'. Seeing no need to stop at the latter geographic feature – which he does not mention – he observes instead:

> Si, après avoir parcouru de l'oeil toutes ces vastes provinces, vous jetez la vue sur l'orient, c'est là que les limites de l'Europe et de l'Asie se confondent encore. Il aurait fallu un nouveau nom pour cette grande partie du monde. Les anciens divisèrent en Europe, Asie et Afrique, leur univers connu; ils n'en avaient pas vu la dixième partie; c'est ce qui fait que quand on a passé les Palus-Méotides,[19] on ne sait plus où l'Europe finit et où l'Asie commence; tout ce qui est au delà du mont Taurus était designé par le mot vague de Scythie, et le fut ensuite par celui de Tartarie ou Tatarie. Il serait convenable peut-être d'appeler terres arctiques ou terres de nord tout le pays qui s'étend depuis la mer Baltique jusqu'aux confins de la Chine, comme on donne le nom de terres australes à la partie du monde non moins vaste, située sous le pôle antarctique, et qui fait le contre-poids du globe.[20]

> [If after surveying all these vast provinces, we direct our view towards the east, we shall find the limits of Europe and Asia again confounded. A new name is wanting for this considerable part of the globe. The ancients divided their known world into Europe, Asia, and Africa; but they had not seen the tenth part of it; hence it happens, that when we pass the Palus Mæotis, we are at a loss to know where Europe ends, or Asia begins; all that tract of country lying beyond mount Taurus was distinguished by the general appellation of Scythia,

[18] *OH*, p. 501. [19] The Sea of Azov. [20] *Histoire de la Russie*, ch. I; *OH*, p. 368.

and afterwards by that of Tartary. It might not be improper, perhaps, to give the name of Terræ Arcticæ, or Northern Lands, to the country extending from the Baltic Sea, to the confines of China; as that of Terræ Australes, or Southern Lands, are to that equally extensive part of the world, situated under the Antarctic Pole, and which serves to counterpoise the globe.][21]

Within a few years navigators of the Pacific would dissolve the great southern continent into a circumnavigated Australia and an Antarctica suspected behind the pack-ice; but here *le nord* has grown into a continental entity in its own right. It is less an extension of Europe into Asia than a solvent of both ancient terms; but the Treaty of Nerchinsk associates the Chinese ecumene with 'Europe' as Voltaire still understands the term. He celebrates the treaty as drawing the self-enclosed and self-isolated empire into the network of *jus gentium*, *confédérations* in the sense of treaty relations, and above all commerce, which defined enlightened Europe to itself. For the first time China has signed a treaty implicitly recognising an equal partner in a society of states, and it is the Europeanisation as well as the extension of Russia which has rendered this global association possible.[22] Never before has China made war or signed a treaty, the two modes of recognising the existence of another state; Voltaire did not live to see the failure of Lord Macartney's mission in 1793. He gives credit for the introduction of the terminology of *jus gentium* to the two Jesuit missionaries who accompanied the Chinese ambassadors and acted as interpreters, but does not mention them – as he might have – when giving equal emphasis to the language in which both Russians and Chinese supposedly invoke the same God as witness to their treaty. The full significance of this will appear when we examine the intermittently central role of China in the structure of both the *Siècle de Louis XIV* and the *Essai sur les moeurs*.

The commercial society of nations which is the structure of enlightened Europe has now extended beyond its limits, to include the other great empire of the Old World; and the role of Petrine Russia is to modernise itself so as to consolidate that Euro-Chinese society of nations. Everything Peter does, to round out his realm by conquests and to enlighten his subjects by enforced changes in their customs, is subordinated to that end; Russians must become Europeans so that their state may engage in commerce, and war is the prelude to treaties as treaties are the prelude to commerce. The condition of Muscovite Russia was

[21] Translation by Tobias Smollett, 1769, as reprinted in Voltaire, *Works*, Boston, 1906, vol. XXIV, p. 39. I have found no more modern edition of this translation.
[22] *Histoire de la Russie*, ch. 7; *OH*, pp. 409–11.

barbarous, and Peter himself is half a barbarian, so that the enterprise of civilisation is never quite complete. The Swedish prisoners taken at Poltava – officers as well as soldiers – vanish into a gulag from which few ever return, and that after many years;[23] the Russian space begins to play its part as the black hole of European civility. In later chapters Voltaire has a classic palace tragedy to recount, that of the Tsarevitch Alexis; it is noteworthy that, though he firmly held himself to be a tragedian the equal of Sophocles, these terrible events are neither dramatised nor sentimentalised. 'La loi de l'histoire ne nous a permis de rien déguiser, ni de rien affaiblir dans le récit de cette tragique aventure.'[24] Voltaire recounts the events with the laconic rigour proper to the *arcana* of history, and at the end we do not know, as we cannot, exactly what happened to Alexis or what were the feelings of his father. Peter's claim to have entered civilised society is made to consist in his publication of an account of his conduct, which he submitted to the judgment of mankind and posterity. This, says Voltaire, Philip II at the death of Don Carlos – Gibbon was to add the Emperor Constantine at the death of his son Crispus – had not the courage to do.[25] The language of neo-classical history remains the discourse of both absolute monarchy and Enlightenment.

Voltaire's concluding verdict on Peter runs in part:

L'Europe a reconnu qu'il avait aimé la gloire, mais qu'il l'avait mise à faire du bien, que ses défauts n'avaient jamais affaibli ses grandes qualités, qu'en lui l'homme eut ses taches, et que le monarque fut toujours grand. Il a forcé la nature en tout, dans ses sujets, dans lui-même, et sur la terre, et sur les eaux; mais il l'a forcée pour l'embellir. Les arts, qu'il a transplantés de ses mains dans les pays dont plusieurs alors étaient sauvages, ont, en fructifiant, rendu temoignage à son génie, et eternisé sa mémoire; ils paraissent aujourd'hui originaires des pays mêmes où il les a portés. Lois, police, politique, discipline militaire, marine, commerce, manufactures, sciences, beaux-arts, tout s'est perfectionné selon ses vues; et, par une singularité dont il n'est point d'exemple, ce sont quatre femmes, montées après lui successivement sur le trône, qui ont maintenu tout ce qu'il acheva, et ont perfectionné tout ce qu'il entreprit.[26]

[All Europe knows, that though he was fond of fame, he coveted it only for noble principles; that though he had faults, they never obscured his noble qualities, and that though, as a man, he was liable to errors, as a monarch he was always great: he every where forced nature, in his subjects, in himself, by

[23] *OH*, pp. 182–3, 245, 471, 473, 525. [24] *OH*, p. 556.
[25] *OH*, p. 556; *EM*, II, pp. 463–4; *Decline and Fall*, vol. II, ch. 18; Womersley, I, p. 650; Bury, II, p. 222. In note 20, Gibbon cites Voltaire's *Histoire de Pierre le Grand*, which therefore he knew by 1781. He does not allude to the case of Don Carlos. [26] *Histoire de la Russie*, ch. 17; *OH*, pp. 597–8.

sea and land; but he forced her only to render her more pleasing and noble. The arts, which he transplanted with his own hands, into countries till then in a manner savage, have flourished, and produced fruits which are lasting testimonies of his genius, and will render his memory immortal, since they now appear as natives of those places to which he introduced them. The civil, political, and military government, trade, manufactures, the arts and the sciences, have all been carried on according to his plan, and by an event not to be paralleled in history, we have seen four women successively ascend the throne after him, who have maintained, in full vigour, all the great designs he accomplished, and have completed those which he had begun.][27]

There was no need in the conventions of historiography for panegyric to be uncritical, but this goes beyond panegyric of the ordinary kind. Peter's vices are those of an absolutist revolutionary who has transformed the culture of his people and – a phenomenon never known before – has had for successors four women who have not merely abstained from ruining his work, but ruled with such strength of character that they have perfected it. The *Histoire de la Russie* opens with an angry aside directed against that *polisson*, the author of the *Contrat social*, who has declared that Peter's reforms must fail because they have no roots in the customs of his people, and that sooner or later the Russian empire must break up and the Tartars return to Europe.[28] Always the exponent of a *thèse royale*, Voltaire closes this history in a way that shows his lack of anticipatory sympathy with all those Russians who will cry out against the bronze horseman who has forced nature in every way.

[27] Smollett, pp. 118–19. The use of 'noble' three times in this translation, where the French equivalent does not appear in Voltaire's text, may be worth remarking.
[28] *Histoire de la Russie*, 'Preface Historique et Critique'; *OH*, p. 339.

CHAPTER 6

Courtly monarchy as instrument of Enlightenment: the Siècle de Louis XIV

Louis XIV, the least heroic figure and yet the central hero in Voltaire's mirror of princes,[29] has no need to force nature, because he is a *principe naturale* where Peter is a *principe nuovo* in a sense deeper even than Machiavelli's. Peter is surrounded from his youth by bearded boyars, barbarous *streltsi*, boon companions and more than usually unpleasing priests; Louis grows up in a court and a palace which, however gothic, irresponsible and devout, nevertheless reflect the classical resources, the decline into Christian barbarism, and the recovery through neo-classical letters, of the civilisation he is to enlighten and transform. Peter's task is to wrench Muscovite Russia out of a Byzantine and Mongol history almost too dark to deserve the name, and to integrate it forcibly with the history of Europe. He is therefore obliged *transplanter de ses mains*, and it is for the tsarinas after him *perfectionner tout ce qu'il entreprit*; but Louis has only *perfectionner*, and is legitimised by all the cultural resources he is to exploit. His enlightenment is absolute rather than despotic – Voltaire makes much of the distinction – and when he forces nature (which he does rarely) it is a fault in his reign. He is European, and has no need to transplant; even his revolutions are internal.

It follows that 'Europe' is a Latin and neo-Latin construct, and that even its barbarism is a form of degenerate Latinity; while its recovery is to be expressed in overwhelmingly neo-classical terms. This point opens the way to Voltaire's periodisation of European history, and to the problem of exactly what he meant by *les moeurs* and *l'esprit*. Where the *Histoire de la Russie* opens with a Herodotean survey of the *terre arctique* and the remote peoples inhabiting it, the *Siècle de Louis XIV* opens with a declaration that a new kind of history is needed, but proceeds to define it in wholly Eurocentric language.

[29] 'He performed great actions without being a great man'; Gibbon's verdict (*Journal A*, p. 130).

Ce n'est pas seulement la vie de Louis XIV qu'on prétend écrire; on se propose un plus grand objet. On veut essayer de peindre à la posterité, non les actions d'un seul homme, mais l'esprit des hommes dans le siècle le plus éclairé qui fut jamais.

Tous les temps ont produit des héros et des politiques: tous les peuples ont éprouvé des révolutions: toutes les histoires sont presque égales pour qui ne veut mettre que des faits dans sa mémoire. Mais quiconque pense, et ce qui est encore plus rare, quiconque a du goût, ne compte que quatre siècles dans l'histoire du monde. Ces quatre âges heureux sont ceux où les arts ont été perfectionnés, et qui, servants d'époque à la grandeur de l'esprit humain, sont l'exemple de la posterité.[30]

[The life of Lewis XIV is not the only object of this work: its design is greater and more extensive. We would endeavour to describe to posterity, not the actions only of one man, but the genius of the age; that age which was the most enlightened of all others.

Heroes and politicians are the product of all ages: all nations have suffered revolutions; and all histories are equal to him who reads only to store his memory with facts. But whoever thinks, and, what is yet more uncommon, whoever has taste, will regard only four ages in the history of the world. These four happy ages are those wherein the arts have been perfected, and which, serving for an epocha of the grandeur of the human understanding, are an example to all posterity.][31]

If the word *éclairé* permits us to say that we have before us Voltaire's definition of Enlightenment – and the notion is operative throughout the work we are studying – the passage also informs us that a *siècle éclairé* is one in which *les arts ont été perfectionnés*. The primary definition of Enlightenment is therefore neo-classical, but the meaning of *les arts* is about to open out beyond the courtly with which it begins, and may arrive at the *Encyclopédiste*. Closely coincident in time with d'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire à l'Encyclopédie*, this exordium joins it in condemning a historiography allegedly interested in nothing but *mettre des faits dans la mémoire*, but finds much for *le goût* to feed upon in studying *les époques de l'esprit humain*. Gibbon used the phrase 'the nobler faculties of the imagination and the judgment' as Voltaire employs *le goût* and, when taking the *Siècle* in hand about the time he had completed the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, must have found in it reinforcement for what he had wanted to say. And when Voltaire says that nothing is worth studying except four ages in which *les arts ont été perfectionnés*, he does not intend d'Alembert's rigorous separation between a, *histoire des rois* and a, *histoire*

[30] *Siècle de Louis XIV*, ch. i, 'Introduction'; *OH*, p. 616.

[31] Translation by Nugent, 1752, i, pp. 1–2. Note the rendering of 'éclairé' by 'enlightened'.

des gens de lettres. His tabulation of the ages in question shows that in every case the fine arts, literature and philosophy were both the effects and the instruments of enlightened monarchy.

Le premier de ces siècles, à qui la véritable gloire est attachée, est celui de Philippe et d'Alexandre, ou celui des Périclès

– a neat elision of Hellenistic monarchy with Athenian liberty when it was a monarchy of the first citizen –

des Démosthène, des Aristote, des Platon, des Apelle, des Phidias, des Praxitèle; et cet honneur a été renfermé dans les limites de la Grèce; le reste de la terre alors connue était barbare.

Le second âge est celui de César et d'Auguste, designé encore par les noms de Lucrèce, de Cicéron, de Tite-Live, de Virgile, d'Horace, d'Ovide, de Varron, de Vitruve.

La troisième est celui qui suivit la prise de Constantinople par Mahomet II. Le lecteur peut se souvenir qu'on vit alors en Italie une famille de simples citoyens faire ce qui devaient entreprendre les rois de l'Europe. Les Médicis appelèrent à Florence les savants, que les Turcs chassaient de la Grèce; c'était le temps de la gloire de l'Italie. Les beaux-arts y avaient déjà repris une vie nouvelle; les Italiens les honorèrent du nom de vertu, comme les premiers Grecs les avaient caractérisés du nom de sagesse. Tout tendait à la perfection.[32]

[The first of these ages, to which true glory is annexed, is that of Philip and Alexander; or of Pericles, Demosthenes, Aristotle, Plato, Apelles, Phidias, and Praxiteles; and this honour was confined within the limits of Greece: the rest of the world was barbarous.

The second age is that of Caesar and Augustus; which is also distinguished by the names of Lucretius, Cicero, Livy, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Varro, Vitruvius, etc.

The third is that which followed the taking of Constantinople by Mahomet II. Then it was that a single family of citizens only, were seen in Italy, to do what should have been undertaken by the kings of Europe: the Medici drew to Florence the arts, which the Turks banished out of Greece. The splendours of Italy now shone with the brightest lustre. All the sciences recovered new life. The Italians honoured them with the name of *Vertu*, as the Greeks had characterized them by the name of Wisdom. Every thing tended towards perfection.][33]

Pericles, Augustus and Lorenzo de' Medici were all first citizens, bridging the gap between republic and monarchy. The name of Tacitus is absent, and Voltaire is not endorsing (as Gibbon will) his dictum that the arts flourished only under republican liberty and declined with it.

[32] *OH, ibid.* [33] Tr. Nugent, 1752, i, p. 2.

Even *virtù*, that crucially republican term, has been appropriated by the *beaux-arts* which flourish under princely and courtly patronage; there is no echo of Gibbon's hint that the Medici substituted the arts for liberty. The fourth age, the climax of all Voltaire's historiography, is altogether monarchical.

Le quatrième siècle est celui qu'on nomme le siècle de Louis XIV, et c'est peut-être celui des quatre qui approche le plus de la perfection. Enrichi des découvertes des trois autres, il a plus fait en certains genres que les trois ensemble. Tous les arts, à la vérité, n'ont point été poussés plus loin que sous les Médicis, sous les Auguste et les Alexandre;[34] mais la raison humaine en général s'est perfectionnée. La saine philosophie n'a été connue que dans ce temps, et il est vrai de dire qu'à commencer depuis les dernières années du cardinal de Richelieu jusqu'a celles qui ont suivi la mort de Louis XIV, il s'est fait dans nos arts, dans nos esprits, dans nos moeurs, comme dans notre gouvernement, une révolution générale, qui doit servir de marque éternelle à la vèritable gloire de notre patrie. Cette heureuse influence ne s'est pas même arrêtée en France; elle s'est étendue en Angleterre; elle a excité l'émulation dont avait alors besoin cette nation spirituelle et hardie; elle a porté le goût en Allemagne, les sciences en Russie; elle a même ranimé l'Italie qui languissait, et l'Europe a dû sa politesse et l'esprit de société à la cour de Louis XIV.[35]

[Finally, the fourth is that which is called The age of Lewis XIV, and it is, perhaps, of the four, that which approaches the nearest to perfection. Being enriched with the discoveries of the preceding ages, it made a greater progress in some things than the three others together. Indeed, all the arts were never carried to a greater degree of perfection than under the ages of the Medicis, the Augustus's, and the Alexanders, but human reason, in general, was in this brought nearer to perfection. True philosophy was discovered only in this age: and it may with truth be said, that, from the last years of cardinal Richelieu to the death of Lewis XIV, there happened, a general revolution, not only in our government, but in our arts, minds, and manners; which ought to be an eternal epocha of the true glory of our country. And this happy influence was not confined to France, but extended into England, where it excited the emulation which that sensible and thinking nation then wanted. It carried taste into Germany, and the sciences into Muscovy; it even animated the languishing state of Italy; and Europe, in general, owes its politeness to the court of Lewis XIV.][36]

The fourth of the ages worth studying is that in which royal grandeur, altogether divorced from the republican origins of civility, makes itself the patron of neo-classical perfection and enlightened philosophy. The court – one has to look behind the intrigues and frivolity which do not

[34] An interesting plural, since all Roman emperors were Augusti; is the exemplary but unreal Alexander Severus in Voltaire's mind? [35] *OH*, p. 617. [36] Nugent, 1752, I, pp. 3–4.

cease to characterise it – is the principal engine in socialising European humanity; Voltaire's vision of enlightenment is royal and noble in the last degree. The fine arts and their perfection are the chief means of instituting courtly manners, which spread downwards through society. We shall see that they presuppose a foundation in commerce and the useful arts, and if these are to be thought of as *bourgeois*, the court and its manners are the patrons and the historical allies of the *bourgeoisie*. The strong and cultivated states, the *états policés*, governed through the encouragement of manners and neo-classical culture, which now emerge under French leadership but equally in rivalry with it – Voltaire has furnished the formula for the co-existence of French anglomania with English gallomania[37] – form the confederation or republic of Europe that succeeds the age of religious warfare and (though Voltaire does not believe in this) the threat of universal empire; *la saine philosophie* substitutes commerce for theology.

This 'Ludovican moment' is the last of the four ages in which the fine arts took shape as a political culture that made civilisation possible; but the four are not arranged in a developmental sequence around which a narrative of universal history is constructed. They are simply the moments at which the resources of classical culture are accumulated for the use of modernity. The Ludovican moment marks the birth of enlightened Europe; sequentially, however, it is the end of the nine centuries of French, and therefore European, history which began with the *siècle* of Charlemagne, and the *Essai sur les moeurs* will offer a survey of that dark age of barbarism and religion. We have met with 'the Enlightened narrative'.

The *Siècle de Louis XIV* is more than panegyric, and more than a balanced assessment of its hero's good and bad actions and qualities; it furnishes him with a place in history and enquires into the history he left behind him. Its opening chapters depict the state of Europe and of France at his birth and during his minority: conditions which are the last phase of those in which Europe has struggled since the era of Charlemagne, with a nobility still gothic in behaviour and a religion still capable of disrupting the civil order, so far as there is one. Richelieu's statecraft and Condé's victories have done something to remedy the situation, and the latter serve to remind us that Voltaire's conventional dismissal of histories which pointlessly recount the detail of battles never prevents him from writing vivid accounts of war, both in neo-classical

[37] See *EEG*, p. 113.

and heroic narrative and with close attention to its changing historical character. When Richelieu is succeeded by Mazarin and the wars of the Fronde break out, Condé and Turenne figure as captains in civil war and as condottieri passing between the French and Spanish service. The Fronde is presented as the display of pure frivolity and irresponsibility which historians have classically made of it,[38] and we see that Voltaire is writing *l'histoire des moeurs*, aiming to show what civil war was like in a certain state of French culture – very unlike the English, who fought their civil wars in grim earnest.[39]

It is this state of culture which Louis XIV sets out to terminate and transform, and not the least of his achievements is that he brings Condé and Turenne back to their true role as marshals of France. The primary means by which this is accomplished, from the moment at which he assumes personal control of his household, is the creation of an effective palace government; this in turn is achieved by means partly administrative – he orders ministers to report to him direct and makes himself master of as much detail as he can – and partly ceremonial: he causes the court to revolve around his person and conceive of itself as the instrument of his *gloire*. This is the point at which the courtly arts (and their perfection) become instruments of control; they are rituals which dramatise his primacy, services which can be performed only to him, and benefactions which only he can confer. Policy is ritualised as a search for precedence and glory – there is a contrast between the symbolic authority of the emperors and the real precedence of the kings of France, who have 'fondé le véritable empire d'Occident, dont le seul nom subsiste en Allemagne'[40] – and this rapidly develops into a struggle for the control of territory; Voltaire's understanding of neo-classical culture entails a clear vision of how symbols convey real power. Louis's first wars, for the possession of Franche-Comté, are semi-ritualised enactments of dynastic authority, in which cities surrender at the mere display of his army's presence. Voltaire knows why it was that his hero liked to command in person at sieges, which were formalised exercises in war as an art and a manifestation of glory, but wisely yielded to his generals when it came to campaigns and battles, in which blood is the argument and fortune asserts her domain.[41] A great king's business – ancients and neo-classicals could agree – was to choose and command great captains, not to be one himself.

Voltaire could claim to be a historian of courts, rather than a court

[38] See, however, Ranum, 1993. [39] *OH*, p. 652. [40] *Siècle*, ch. vii; *OH*, p. 688.
[41] *OH*, pp. 698–9, 702, 716–17, 728–9, 738–41.

historian; not only did he understand the historical function of courts, but as an artisan of glory was never debarred from criticising its exercise. He wrote always in the great tradition, as a historian who scrutinised actions of state, probed their mysteries and examined the failures which were so characteristic of them. His Louis XIV commits at least two great errors, of which one occurs in the domain of war and policy: the invasion of the Netherlands in 1672, not part of a competition for glory among the civilising dynasts of Europe, but an attempt to destroy a state constituted on principles quite other than those of any kingdom. Voltaire admires the Dutch for their republican virtue and austerity, their commercial acumen and industry; he says that had Amsterdam fallen, the merchants would have set sail for Indonesia (like the Trojans of old);[42] but he knows too much about Dutch politics to take their High Mightinesses for a Roman senate. Amsterdam saves itself by cutting the dykes, but the real disaster for France lies in the field of princely politics; the invasion calls up the undying enmity of William III of Orange and later of England and Scotland, a prince whom Louis and his ministers always underestimate. They do not realise how deeply they insulted him in 1672; they do not appreciate that though worsted in most battles – in which he commands in person – he is always undefeated at the end of the campaign;[43] above all, they do not realise the extent of his objectives in the English expedition of 1688, which Voltaire presents as equally a great domestic crime and a great triumph of policy.[44] The dynastic wars of Europe, Voltaire likes to say, are civil wars in the sense that they are fought between members of the same ruling families.[45] Perhaps this is a diminished understanding of what wars and civil wars are; in any case, William III is always something more than an actor in the theatre of politics as Louis understands and seeks to control it. He is the author of his own scenarios, and so is the kingdom of which he usurps the throne. In recounting the diplomatic prelude to the great war of 1702, Voltaire emphasises that Louis was generally cautious and open to negotiation. His one disastrous error was symbolic, the recognition of James III as king of England at his exiled father's death; Louis saw this as an act of princely generosity and did not realise (or did not care) that the English would see it as an intolerable usurpation,[46] spurring them to the war which lasted eleven years and brought France to the edge of collapse. In

[42] *OH*, p. 718. The Trojan comparison is not drawn, but it may be implicit. The image recurs when Gibbon envisages a Europe, overrun by future barbarians, embarking for America (*Decline and Fall*, vol. III, ch. 38; the 'General Observations'). [43] *OH*, pp. 781–808.
[44] *OH*, pp. 763, 767, 786, 808–9. [45] *OH*, pp. 885–6. [46] *OH*, pp. 805–7.

the last analysis, Voltaire is a realist historian, acknowledging that there are forces in human affairs which the state as a work of neo-classical art cannot control and may calamitously underestimate. What Louis XIV's great exposition of kingship as an art-form nevertheless achieved was a transformation of European culture.

The reign's second major error is committed in the field of religious policy: the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and the accompanying diaspora of the Huguenots – that event of such importance to Enlightenment in Protestant cultures. Voltaire deals with it in chapter xxxvi, belonging to the second part of his book: chapters xxv–xxxix, which occur after the narrative of wars and other affairs of state has been carried down to the Treaty of Utrecht and the death of the great king. These *anecdotes du règne* deal successively with *l'amour, gouvernement intérieur, les beaux-arts* and *affaires ecclésiastiques*; it is characteristic of the historiography of the age – though Gibbon wished that this limitation had been overcome[47] – that these matters, constituting an *histoire des moeurs* of at least equal importance with the history of the *res gestae* of kings, can be dealt with only in a series of appendages to the narrative of state affairs. It may have been the prominence accorded to the anecdotes, nevertheless, which moved d'Alembert to describe the *Siècle* as a work without precedent, and all these subjects have their place in the history of Louis XIV's achievement. Even the cold, pompous and frequently unloving sexual affairs of the king and his courtiers figure in the construction of a culture of courtly manners; Versailles at its least admirable is preferable to a social space occupied by fanaticism and civil war.

The *anecdotes du règne* extend beyond *l'amour* to become illustrations of the life of Versailles, which, even though it includes abortion scandals and trials for witchcraft and poisoning, is an instrument for civilising both France and Europe. They lead into an account of the government of the realm, at whose centre we find *la police* – concerned with public works and beautification as much as with law enforcement and civil peace – and *les finances*, which pay for both *police* and *gloire*. These themes are naturally succeeded by that of *les sciences* and *les beaux-arts*, in which we are reminded that Voltaire's index to the peace and enlightenment of Europe is its ability to complete what the ancients began and to outdo them where they made false starts. His encomia extend to *érudits* as well as to *philosophes* and to English scholars as well as French; Marsham understands chronology better than the Romans, Hyde understands

[47] *Journal A*, p. 129.

Zoroaster better than the Persians, Sale is a better historian of primitive Islam than any Turk.[48] Locke is the only philosopher of significance since Plato, and is devoid of the nonsense of which Plato is full.[49]

Il suffit ici d'avoir fait voir que dans le siècle passé les hommes ont acquis plus de lumières, d'un bout de l'Europe à l'autre, que dans tous les âges précédents.[50]

[It is enough here to have made it clear that during the last century men acquired more enlightenment, from one end of Europe to the other, than in all previous ages.][51]

Voltaire was a *moderne* in the sense that he thought his age had outdone the ancients, an *ancien* in the sense that he thought the ancients had set the standards by which they were to be outdone. Only when he turns to the philosophy of Newton does he recognise an achievement 'modern' in the sense that it was founded in a method radically unlike that of the 'ancient', which it altogether replaced; and Newton left Voltaire's aesthetics unaffected. Neo-classical *perfectionnement* remained his paradigmatic definition of enlightenment, and when after 1772 he composed the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*, and considered the history the great reign had left behind it, he was perturbed both by the thought that he was living in a silver age, and by the growth of new, reckless and unclassical cultural language – in which of course the unspeakable author of *Emile* and the *Contrat social* was taking the lead.[52] Rousseau and Voltaire had few years to live, but since 1750 the former had been telling the apostles of sociability that sociability was not going to be enough. He was not a fanatic, but his paranoia aroused both fears of fanaticism and perhaps the thing itself. Gibbon was never enough of a *philosophe* to perceive Jean-Jacques as a threat, but he found fanatics of his own to fear; one of these was Joseph Priestley.

Fanaticism remained rooted in religion – the fanaticism of enlightenment itself was a discovery of the 1790s – and the concluding chapters of the *Siècle de Louis XIV* are an assessment of Louis's successes and failures in dealing with it. If one root cause of fanaticism is the inveterate superstition of the people, which renders it dangerous to undeceive them,[53] the most immediate is the claim of Rome to exercise jurisdiction on spiritual grounds which can never be part of civil reason and must

[48] *Siècle*, ch. xxiv; *OH*, p. 1024. [49] *OH*, pp. 1025–6. [50] *OH*, p. 1028.
[51] Trans. JGAP. Not to be found in Nugent. There is no close English equivalent for *lumières* in the plural, and the practice of translating it as 'enlightenment' is too strongly established to be resisted. Voltaire has not told us where 'the other end of Europe' is situated; Potsdam or St Petersburg? [52] *OH*, pp. 1568–71. [53] *OH*, p. 1040.

always subvert civil society. Early in the *Siècle*, Voltaire says of monks what every Protestant said of papists: that each of them is bound by oath to obey the Pope as civil sovereign.[54] The remedy in France is the liberties of the Gallican church, which free ecclesiastics from the Pope's authority by subjecting them to that of the king; a position which regularly brought the French and English monarchs close together in ecclesiastical policy without ever bringing them into alliance. In 1681–2, the year of the great controversy over the *régale*, the formidably virtuous Pope Innocent XI

fut inflexible: il cassa par un bref toutes les résolutions de l'assemblée, et manda aux évêques de se retracter. Il y avait là de quoi séparer à jamais l'Eglise de France de celle de Rome. On avait porté, sous le cardinal de Richelieu et sous Mazarin, de faire une patriarche . . . Si le roi l'avait voulu, il n'avait qu'à dire un mot; il était maître de l'assemblée du clergé, et il avait pour lui la nation. Rome eût tout perdu par l'inflexibilité d'un pontife vertueux, qui seul de tous les papes de ce siècle, ne savait pas s'accommoder aux temps. Mais il y a d'anciennes bornes qu'on ne remue pas sans de violentes secousses. Il fallait de plus grands intérêts, de plus grands passions, et plus d'effervescence dans les esprits –

in short, it needed a 1789 –

pour rompre tout à coup avec Rome; et il était bien difficile de faire cette scission tandis qu'on voulait extirper le calvinisme.[55]

. . . la dispute resta couverte d'un voile, sans être decidée, comme il arrive presque toujours dans un État qui n'a pas sur ces matières des principes invariables et reconnus. Ainsi, tantôt on s'élève contre Rome, tantôt on lui cède, suivant les caractères de ceux qui gouvernent, et suivant les intérêts particuliers de ceux par qui les principaux de l'Etat sont gouvernés.[56]

[. . . the pope continued inflexible. He reversed by a brief all the resolutions of the assembly, and wrote to the bishops to retract their concessions. Here was ground enough to separate for ever the church of France from that of Rome. There had been some talk, under the cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, of erecting a patriarch . . . Had the king been inclined to take this step, the least intimation of his pleasure was sufficient. He was master of the voices in the assembly of the clergy. The nation was ripe for such a revolution, and would not have failed to declare for him. Rome would have lost all by the inflexibility of a virtuous pope, who alone, of all the pontiffs of that age, knew not how to accommodate himself to conjunctures. But there are certain ancient boundaries, which cannot be passed without causing violent shocks. It required stronger ties of interest, more violent passions, and greater perturbations in the minds of men, to break all at once with Rome; nor could such a separation have

[54] *OH*, p. 627. [55] *Siècle*, ch. xxxv; *OH*, pp. 1037–8. [56] *OH*, pp. 1039–40.

been easily effected, while the ministry persisted in the design of extirpating Calvinism.

. . . the dispute remained in a kind of uncertainty, without any positive decision, as almost always happens in cases of this nature, when a state has no fixed and invariable principles to go by. Thus sometimes we oppose, sometimes yield to the encroachments of the court of Rome, according to the variety of conjunctures, the different characters of our governors, or the particular interests of those who influence their determinations.][57]

If Voltaire has not Giannone's confidence that France will resist Rome *con ferro e con fuoco* instead of temporising, it is because he wants to go further than Giannone could be expected to advocate. Henry VIII of England had taken that step, and it was still not entirely clear that seizure of the *potestas jurisdictionis* meant denying the Pope the *potestas ordinis*. If the mere mention of reconciliation with Rome was enough to set civil war on foot in England, civil war was more than once incurred; and it is entirely possible that James II, never an ultramontane, intended little more than an equation of the *ecclesia anglicana* with the *église gallicane*. Voltaire notes that Innocent XI found little to oppose in the *coup d'état* of 1688;[58] he had one Gallican king on his hands already and felt no wish for another.

It was of course, the Revocation and the *Refuge* which did most to render James II's professions of toleration unconvincing to his subjects, and Voltaire is obliged to admit that the great assault on French Protestantism was less a papal than a Gallican act of persecution. A pupil of the Jesuits who held them in peculiar loathing, he lost no opportunity of presenting them as the ubiquitous agents of Roman claims at their worst. Their suppression in 1773, as depicted in the *Précis du siècle de Louis XV*, ought to have been the crowning triumph – the capture by Enlightenment of the papal throne itself – if the aged Voltaire had not been acutely aware that new historical forces were at work.[59] In the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, however, he does not attempt to make the Society responsible for the disaster of 1685. The Revocation was not the work of the Jesuits or the *dévotes*, Père La Chaise or Madame de Maintenon; Voltaire is fully conscious that it was the product of arrogance of state on the part of Louis and his ministers, who destroyed the Huguenots, as they did the Jansenists,[60] out of sheer inability to bear the thought that any group should dissent from them in an organised fashion.[61] Here we expect him to explore the psychology of state power,

[57] Nugent, 1752, I, pp. 186, 190. [58] *OH*, p. 1037. [59] *OH*, pp. 1536–7.
[60] *Siècle*, ch. xxxvii, pp. 1063–88. [61] *OH*, pp. 1049, 1077.

the limitations and self-betrayals of the neo-classical mind; instead, he offers something rather different. Like Jansenism and like Quietism,[62] Calvinism and its sibling Arminianism[63] show us what happens when authority based on theology is resisted on grounds themselves theological: fanaticism in the form of enthusiasm, the dissenting (even the liberated) intellect's conviction that it is itself inspired.

L'esprit dogmatique apporta chez les hommes la fureur des guerres de religion. J'ai recherché longtemps comment et pourquoi cet esprit dogmatique, qui divisa les écoles de l'antiquité païenne sans causer le moindre trouble, en a produit parmi nous de si horribles. Ce n'est pas le seul fanatisme qui en est cause; car les gymnosophistes et les bramins, les plus fanatiques des hommes, ne firent jamais de mal qu'à eux-mêmes. Ne pouvait-on pas trouver l'origine de cette nouvelle peste qui a ravagé la terre dans ce combat naturel de l'esprit républicain, qui anima les premières Églises, contre l'autorité, qui hait la résistance en tout genre? Les assemblées secrètes, qui bravaient d'abord dans les caves et dans les grottes les lois de quelques empereurs romains, formèrent peu à peu un État dans l'État. C'était une république cachée au milieu de l'empire. Constantin la tire de dessous terre pour la mettre à côté du trône. Bientôt l'autorité attachée aux grands sièges se trouva en opposition avec l'esprit populaire qui avait inspiré jusqu'alors toutes les assemblées des chrétiens.[64]

[The dogmatic spirit introduced among men that furious zeal which gave rise to religious wars. I have often considered with myself, from whence it should proceed, that this dogmatical spirit which divided the schools of antiquity among the heathens, without causing the least disturbance, should be productive of so many fatal disorders among us. This cannot be the effect of fanaticism alone; for the Gymnosophists and Bramins, the most fanatic of men, never did hurt to any but themselves. We are more likely to find the origin of this new pest which has laid waste the world, in the republican spirit that animated the first churches. Those secret assemblies, which from their caves and recesses, braved the authority of the Roman emperors, formed by degrees a state within a state. It was in reality a concealed republic within the empire. Constantine drew it from its retreat under ground, to place it on a level with the throne. In a short time, the authority attached to the great sees, was found to run counter to that popular spirit, which had till then animated all the assemblies of Christians.][65]

The reader of Gibbon must decide how far this explanation is adopted in the sixteenth chapter of the *Decline and Fall*. The underground republic – itself the response to a persecution not doctrinally inspired – was an association on the basis of a shared sacred principle.

[62] *Siècle*, ch. xxxviii, pp. 1088–1101.
[63] *Siècle*, ch. xxxviii, p. 1069.
[64] *Siècle*, ch. xxxvi; *OH*, pp. 1041–2.
[65] Nugent, 1752, II, pp. 193–4.

Once the deacon Arius confronted the bishop Athanasius, sacred authority was claimed by hierarchy and dissent alike, and the civil power was faced by a double challenge to its sovereignty. Constantine and Louis alike made the mistake of intervening on one side or the other, thus placing themselves at the disposal of a power other than theirs – a power not of this world, meddling in this world's affairs. The problem was not that authority disliked resistance, but that it repressed resistance in the name of a power that must always resist it. The politically correct course would have been to disdain intervention, employing tolerance, and if necessary toleration, as means of keeping the state's authority above the battle, unsubjected to an authority foreign to its nature. But the contending orthodoxies and heterodoxies claimed to act in the name of doctrines explicitly binding on the state's conscience, and in consequence the strategy of tolerance was greatly reinforced if the state could declare the doctrines unintelligible. Voltaire employs this tactic with the greatest energy; again and again, using all the resources of Enlightened epistemology, he declares that neither ultramontanes nor Gallicans, Jesuits nor Jansenists, Calvinists nor Arminians, Quietists nor their adversaries, knew or could possibly know what they were talking about, and that *la saine philosophie* consisted centrally in the recognition of this absurdity. It was a central mystery of the *siècle de Louis XIV* that the whole power of the French state could find itself ranged against the disciples of the aged Arnauld, himself living peaceably in the Netherlands and writing countless works of theology;[66] but the correct strategy would have been to ignore them, respecting everything about them except their intellects. Toleration implied contempt.[67]

Instead of adopting this strategy – as we shall find Gibbon suggesting would have been appropriate for Constantine when faced with the Arian controversy – the king carried his proceedings against the Jansenists to the disastrous extreme of soliciting from the Pope the bull *Unigenitus*, designed to condemn them. This – a third great error of the reign – was a Jesuit tactic, for which Voltaire blames Le Tellier, the king's confessor, whom he repeatedly describes as a monk; and it divided the Gallican church into the one hundred bishops who accepted the bull and, on the other hand, fifteen bishops, and behind them the *nation* and the *peuple*, who refused it. After Louis's death, the Orleans regency found means of healing this near-schism; French financial institutions permitted a frenzy of speculation, in the midst of which the

[66] *OH*, p. 1074.
[67] I express my debt here to Mankin, 1996.

whole *Unigenitus* controversy appeared ridiculous.[68] The bull was accepted when it had become meaningless, and the reproach of fanaticism now rested with the Jansenist rump who continued to reject it after the triumph of indifference. This is a somewhat questionable victory for Enlightenment; contempt for all religious considerations is good in itself, but here it rests on a foundation of financial irrationality rather than on the Enlightened promotion of sound commerce and the fine and useful arts. The *thèse royale* has been weakened by Louis XIV's errors of policy, and his successors cannot altogether return the monarchy to its role as a leader in the march of mind.

The Jansenists were not really a republic within the state, though the state risked making them one by treating them as if they were. The Huguenots had been a far more formidable association, since they did constitute an organised republic, like the church of antiquity, and from the Edict of Nantes in 1598 to the Peace of Alais in 1629 had been an armed one. Richelieu had destroyed their military power and had aimed at eliminating them by comprehension;[69] Louis's error was to imagine his enlightened authority as needing and justifying repression. Voltaire thinks that the needless theological controversies of his reign encouraged this error,[70] but leaves us in no doubt that the persecutions were the product of an arrogance of state; in proportion as he does so, of course, the Enlightened analysis of fanaticism and intolerance ceases to be enough. However incomplete, his interpretation leaves him free to adopt an Enlightened analysis of the *Refuge*'s effects if not its causes. France lost many thousands of useful subjects, whose resettlement enriched hostile neighbouring states;[71] and just as had been the case with the enlightened and persecuting Romans, the persecution of religion led to a recrudescence of the religious fanaticism from which the state offers the only path of escape. The writings of Jurieu and the armed prophets of the Cevennes accuse the policy of a regime which might have rendered them unthinkable by leaving them alone.[72] We return to that point at which the crisis of 1688 threatens Europe with a new war of religion, and Enlightenment is mobilised to avert it. We have studied Pierre Bayle as an actor in that history;[73] but the *Siècle de Louis XIV* has something more to say about it.

[68] *Siècle*, ch. xxvii. [69] *OH*, p. 1047. [70] *OH*, pp. 1049–50. [71] *OH*, 1055–6.
[72] *OH*, pp. 1057–3. [73] *EEG*, pp. 59–64.

CHAPTER 7

Asia and the dechristianisation of history: the Siècle *and the* Essai sur les moeurs

The problem of persecution and toleration was crucial in the historical thinking of this age. It brought ancient polytheism, incapable of dogma, face to face with dogmatic theology, and the Roman empire, which had first persecuted Christianity and then succumbed to involvement in its disputes, face to face with modern monarchies, French, British and Prussian, seeking none too successfully to avoid a recurrence of persecution and religious strife by disowning that involvement. Though the Christians had been the first to suffer persecution, it could be argued that they were themselves the authors of the intolerance that made persecution possible. Voltaire had employed that logic in studies of Louis XIV's religious policies, showing that the king was both an author of Enlightenment and justly the target of its criticisms. There was one more chapter to come, in which Louis XIV was not directly involved, but which extended the themes of intolerance and indifference beyond Europe itself.

The historiographic conventions of neo-classical culture did not require that the last chapter of a history be its climax or culmination, and we should not overestimate Voltaire's strategic intentions in closing the *Siècle de Louis XIV* with a study of the controversy over the Chinese ceremonies and their place in Christian missionary practice. Nevertheless, this chapter tells us much about what he was doing, and serves to relate the *Siècle* both to the *Histoire de la Russie* and to the beginning and end of the *Essai sur les moeurs*. The Jesuit-trained Voltaire knew a good deal about the history of the Chinese mission, and we have already noted his emphasis on the relatively benign role of Jesuit interpreters in negotiating the Treaty of Nerchinsk. The opening of chapter xxxix of the *Siècle*, however, is written with an evident bias, indicating Voltaire's view both of European history and of the place of Europe in the history of the world.

Ce n'était pas assez pour l'inquiétude de notre esprit que nous disputassions, au bout de dix-sept cents ans, sur des points de notre religion; il fallut encore que celle des Chinois entrât dans nos querelles. Cette dispute ne produisit pas de grands mouvements, mais elle caractérisa plus d'aucune autre cet esprit actif, contentieux et querelleur qui regne dans nos climats.

Le jésuite Mathieu Ricci, sur la fin du XVII siècle, avait été un des premiers missionnaires de la Chine. Les Chinois étaient et sont encore, en philosophie et en littérature, à peu près ce que nous étions il y a deux cents ans. Le respect pour leurs anciens maîtres leur prescrit des bornes qu'ils n'osent passer. Le progrès dans les sciences est l'ouvrage du temps et de la hardiesse de l'esprit. Mais la morale et la police étant plus aisées à comprendre que les sciences, et s'étant perfectionnées chez eux quand les autres arts ne l'étaient pas encore, il est arrivé que les Chinois, demeurés depuis plus de deux milles ans à tous les termes où ils étaient parvenus, sont restés médiocres dans les sciences, et la premier peuple de la terre dans la morale et dans la police, comme le plus ancien.[74]

[It was not sufficient for the disquiet of our minds, that we disputed at the end of seventeen hundred years upon the articles of our own religion, but we must likewise introduce into our quarrels those of the Chinese. This dispute, however, did not produce any great disturbance; but it served more than any other to characterize that restless, wrangling, and contentious spirit, which prevails in our climates.

Matthew Ricci the Jesuit, towards the end of the seventeenth century, had been one of the first missionaries to China. The Chinese were then, and are still almost the same in philosophy and literature, that we were about two hundred years ago. Their respect for the ancient masters, prescribes them certain bounds, which they dare not pass. A progress in the sciences, is the work of time and boldness of genius. But morals and policy, being more easy to comprehend than the sciences, and these being brought to perfection amongst them before other arts, it has happened that the Chinese, who have continued more than 2000 years within the same boundaries they had at first attained, have also remained but indifferent proficients in the sciences; but they are the first people in the world in morals and policy, as well as the most ancient.][75]

Voltaire seems to be imagining that, had the Wars of Religion not overtaken it, the Renaissance of Learning might have left Europe governed by its classical texts as rigorously as China by the Confucian canon. Where he thinks a complete code of civil government was to be found in Greco-Roman literature is not clear – the *Organon* in conjunction with the *Codex*? – and we want to ask him whether the active and contentious spirit of Europe is solely due to Christian disputatiousness; it is surely Hellenic, both political and philosophical. But he has already

[74] *OH*, pp. 1101–2. [75] Nugent, 1752, II, pp. 283–4.

gone on to distinguish between civil morality, which is easy and may be static, and the critical progress of the sciences, in which Europeans excel and Chinese do not; the image of unchanging Cathay is already in place. The *Siècle* has so far encouraged us to think of progress in the sciences, and the perfection of ancient models beyond the ancient achievement, as part of the Enlightened triumph of civil government over religious conflict, and of this in turn as entailing a return to the ease and simplicity of natural morality, which theology and dispute disturb to no useful purpose. But Europeans are now distinguished from Chinese by their capacity for critical and scientific progress, itself – we might think – active, contentious and dynamic. Voltaire does not pursue this question; he prefers to show the Jesuits intruding upon the static world of the Chinese, using science as a mask behind which to introduce the deadly disputatiousness of Christianity. Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall and the others were conducting a kind of counter-Enlightenment.

Après Ricci, beaucoup d'autres jésuites pénétrèrent dans ce vaste empire; et, à la faveur des sciences de l'Europe, ils parvinrent à jeter secrètement quelques semences de la religion chrétienne parmi les enfants du peuple, qu'ils instruisirent comme ils purent. Des dominicains, qui partageaient la mission, accusèrent les jésuites de permettre l'idolatrie en prêchant le christianisme. La question était délicate, ainsi que la conduite qu'il fallait tenir à la Chine.[76]

[After Ricci, many other Jesuits went into this extensive empire; and, by means of the European sciences, they secretly scattered some seeds of Christianity amongst the children of that people, whom they took all proper opportunities to instruct. The Dominicans, some of whom were concerned in the mission, accused the Jesuits of permitting idolatry, whilst they preached up christianity. This was a delicate point, as was likewise the conduct to be observed in China.][77]

Voltaire goes on to explore the debate as to whether the Chinese ancestor-rituals were idolatrous, superstitious or expressions of natural morality. But he has presented the Jesuits in their usual sinister role, and is not interested in their defence against the Dominican charges, though he might very well have endorsed it. He wants to present the Chinese as governed by natural morality, but at the same time to condemn the whole debate whether they were so governed as unnecessary theological nonsense. He does not therefore explore the content of Ricci's writings on Chinese philosophy and religion, which, though in Chinese and

[76] This and the paragraphs previously quoted form the opening of chapter xxxix; *OH*, pp. 1101–8.
[77] Nugent, 1752, II, pp. 283–4.

intended for Confucian readers, could perfectly well have been known to Voltaire.[78] These had argued that the philosophy of the Spring and Autumn period had recognised the existence of a personal God, a *T'ien-ch'u* or Lord of Heaven, and that only Neo-Confucian departure from the original texts had reduced *T'ien* or Heaven to the status of an impersonal principle, a *ch'i* and *li* pervading all things. Ricci and his colleagues had considered the latter doctrine atheistic, in one of the few senses in which they thought atheism possible: the universe as vegetative and eternal, pervaded by a spirit indistinguishable from matter as God was indistinguishable from his creation, a pantheism no less than an atheism, to be found among ancient Epicureans and modern Spinozists. In this light Ricci's work was an appeal to deism against atheism, an attempt to restore the Chinese to the knowledge of one God the Father Almighty before acquainting them with the merits of his Son, a vindication of the natural religion of all mankind from which sinister forces (possibly Buddhist) had led the Neo-Confucians astray. The deist Voltaire loudly proclaims the existence of this religion among the Chinese, and even concedes that the Jesuits recognised it.

Nous avons vu que cette nation remonte, par une histoire authentique, et par une suite de trente-six eclipses de soleil calculées, jusqu'au delà du temps où nous plaçons d'ordinaire le déluge universel. Jamais les lettrés n'ont eu d'autre religion que celus d'un être suprême. Leur culte fut la justice. Ils ne purent connaître les lois successives que Dieu donna à Abraham, à Moïse, et enfin la loi perfectionnée du Messie, inconnue si longtemps aux peuples de l'Occident et du Nord. Il est constant que les Gaules, la Germanie, l'Angleterre, tout le septentrion, étaient plongés dans l'idolâtrie la plus barbare quand les tribunaux du vaste empire de la Chine cultivaient les moeurs et les lois, en reconnaissant un seul Dieu, dont le culte simple n'avait jamais changé parmi eux. Ces vérités évidentes devaient justifier les expressions du jésuite Lecomte. Cependant, comme on pouvait trouver dans ces propositions quelque idée qui choque un peu les idées reçues, on les attaqua en Sorbonne.[79]

[We have seen that this nation goes up, by an authentic history, and a succession of thirty-six great and attested eclipses, even beyond the time where we place the deluge. Never did the literati own any religion but that of a supreme being. Justice was all their worship. They could not know the laws successively given by God to Abraham and Moses, or the perfected law of the Messiah, so long unknown to the peoples of the West and North. It is certain that Gaul, Germany, England and all the north were plunged in the most barbarous idolatry when the tribunals of the vast empire of China were inculcating manners and laws, and acknowledging a single God, whose simple

[78] Rule, 1986. [79] *OH*, p. 1104.

worship had never changed among them. These evident truths should have justified the assertions of the Jesuit Lecomte. However, since it is possible to find in them some ideas a little contrary to those received, they were attacked in the Sorbonne.][80]

Voltaire defends the Chinese against the charge of atheism, so ludicrously levelled by those denying Bayle's contention that a society of atheists could actually exist.[81] What he does not admit is that the Jesuits are of one mind with him on this matter, and that the recognition of a God common to Russians and Chinese was probably inserted in the Treaty of Nerchinsk by the Jesuits he praises for having inserted the language of the *droit des gens*; it is unlikely that the Ch'ing envoys thought much of a God in whose eyes the barbarians were their equals. Voltaire, of course, is not anxious to give Jesuits the credit for anything. What is more arresting is that he is bypassing the possibility that the Chinese really were atheists as that term was understood in Europe, by the Spinozistic atheists like Fréret who saw in Neo-Confucian monism a cosmology resembling their own, or by their critics, whether orthodox theologians or sceptics like Bayle.[82] The thrust of the above passage lies in its concealed irony at the expense of those who would incorporate Chinese history in that of the Old and New Dispensations; the unforgiveable sin of the Jesuits is that Ricci's ascription of deism to the Chinese is intended to pave the way for Christian theology, its disputes and dogmas, and implicitly its persecutions. If the Jesuits were persecuted by their enemies at Rome, it was no more than they deserved.[83]

Voltaire praises the enlightened K'ang-hsi and Yungching emperors who prohibited missionary activity on the ground that its disputatiousness threatened the public peace, enquiring what Europeans would think if Chinese conducted their doctrinal arguments among them (as in Korea and Japan it might be held that they did). He concludes the *Siècle de Louis XIV* by raising a question recurrent in future Enlightened discussions of the European conquest of the planet:

Cette fureur des prosélytes est une maladie particulière à nos climats: ainsi qu'on l'a déjà remarqué, elle a toujours été inconnue dans la haute Asie. Jamais ces peuples n'ont envoyé de missionnaires en Europe; et nos nations sont les seules qui aient voulu porter leurs opinions, comme leur commerce, aux deux extrémités du globe.[84]

[80] Translation continued by JGAP. The passage does not occur in Nugent. [81] *OH*, p. 1103.
[82] See the analysis of Chinese philosophy by Fréret; *EEG*, pp. 162–8.
[83] There is praise of one Jesuit, Parennin, 'homme célèbre par ses connoissances et par la sagesse . . . non seulement comme interprète, mais comme bon mathématicien' (*OH*, p. 1108).
[84] *OH*, p. 1109.

[This rage to make proselytes is a disease peculiar to our climates, since as we have already seen, it has always been unknown in further Asia. Never have these people sent missionaries to Europe; and our nations are the only ones wishing to carry their opinions, like their commerce, to the two extremities of the globe.][85]

We shall see that 'la haute Asie', as used here, means Asia beyond Islam. It is the concluding sentence which poses a duality of concepts stating the problem confronting Enlightenment in the age of European conquest of the global ocean. 'Commerce' was a benign concept; Peter I was applauded for involving China in it, and it was essential to the secular civilisation which was to replace the domination of Christianity. Yet Europeans were carried to the conquest of the ends of the earth by two forces: commerce, which was presumed benign, and 'opinion' – a denigratory term for religious belief – which made Europeans active and contentious, constantly at strife with themselves and others. Could the two be separated? And if they could not – Diderot and Raynal were to ask in the *Histoire des Deux Indes* – ought contact between nations to occur at all?

The civilisations of further and nearer Asia – China, India, Persia and Islam, in that order – are the theme of the opening chapter of the *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*. This ambitious work was undertaken as a product of Voltaire's relationship with Emilie du Chatelet, but completed after her death in ways which link it with the series of Voltaire's major historical writings.[86] It is initially addressed to a 'vous' who may be Madame du Chatelet as recipient, or a *persona* as reader, for whom she serves as prototype; 'vous' change in character as the work progresses. But the claim first made, on which the *Essai*'s character as *sur les moeurs* is based, is that

Vous voulez enfin surmonter le degoût que vous cause l'histoire moderne, depuis la décadence de l'Empire romain, et prendre une idée générale des nations qui habitent et qui désolent la terre. Vous ne cherchez, dans cette immensité, que ce qui mérite d'être connu de vous; l'esprit, les moeurs, les usages des nations principales, appuyés des faits qu'il n'est pas permis d'ignorer.[87]

[You wish then to overcome the distaste which you feel for modern history since the decline of the Roman empire, and to acquire a general idea of the nations that inhabit and desolate the earth. In this immense field you seek only that which deserves to be known by you: the character, customs and usages of

[85] Trans. JGAP. [86] Pomeau, *Chronologie de Voltaire*; *OH*, pp. 28–32. [87] *EM*, I, p. 195.

the principal nations, supported by those facts of which it is impermissible to be ignorant.][88]

It is an aristocratic gambit; most history is not worthy of its reader, who combines a lordly impatience with trivia and an *honnête* recognition that there are *des faits qu'il n'est pas permis d'ignorer*, so that not to know them would be unworthy of her. She is to be selective rather than curious; she already knows what is worth knowing, though she knows that she does not know it all yet. The author is not flirting with his female reader, or condescending to the limitations of her female knowledge; we might indeed ask whether Emilie du Chatelet was not capable of conducting her own reading, or whether she played no part in making the text of the *Essai* what it is. At the end of the work we are told that it was undertaken

pour réconcilier avec les sciences de l'histoire une dame illustre qui possédait presque toutes les autres. Cette femme philosophe était rebutée de deux choses dans la plupart de nos compilations historiques, les détails ennuyeux, et les mensonges révoltants: elle ne pouvait surmonter le dégoût que lui inspirait les premiers temps de nos monarchies modernes avant et après Charlemagne; tout lui paraissait petit et sauvage.[89]

[. . . to reconcile with the sciences of history a lady of quality who was possessed of all the others. This woman philosopher was repelled by two things common to most of our historical compilations: tedious details and disgusting lies. She could not overcome the distaste she felt for the primitive times of our modern monarchies, before and after Charlemagne; everything seemed to her petty and savage.][90]

The *Essai* was written for a *femme philosophe*, but in the body of the work the adjective becomes a masculine noun; it is *le philosophe* whose attention is drawn to those facts worth knowing, and his enlightened intellect is invigorated by the aristocratic *hauteur* with which hers began. This great enquiry into history is moved by disgust with history as read and written; it is not merely the historians writing about the year 800 AD who are *ennuyeux* and *révoltant*, *petit* and *sauvage*, but the human actors and actions forming the subject of their works. There is to be an enquiry into *l'esprit*, *les moeurs*, *les usages des nations principales*, not simply because a history of *res gestae* is despicable and a history of *moeurs* philosophically interesting, but because *l'esprit*, *les moeurs*, *les usages* were themselves despicable, *petits et sauvages*, at the outset of modern history, and *la* or *le philosophe* wants to know how they came to be so and how they became

[88] Trans. JGAP. [89] *EM*, II, p. 900. [90] Trans. JGAP.

what they now are. It will be a question, as we explore the *Essai*, whether *l'histoire des moeurs* is ever enlarged beyond this contrast between the barbarous and the enlightened, or ceases to be displayed chiefly in the *res gestae* of leading historic actors.

The opening gambit of the *Essai* is also subversive; the work exists to enforce as well as overcome contempt for the body of French and European historical literature. The medieval historians were barbarous and their modern compilers little better; not because they lived in a tribal or feudal world, so much as because they were clerics and monastics. The latter's unfitness for the role of historian does not arise simply from their cloistered ignorance of the realities of war and state – Voltaire is not a Bolingbroke aiming at the leisured retirement of a classic historian – but from their commitment to a view of reality incompatible with the autonomy of civil history, whether humanist or *philosophe*. As churchmen, they are the enemies of kings and statesmen and cannot be trusted to tell the truth about them; as historians of the sacred – of the alleged actions of God in a history shaped by these actions – they expound a series of falsehoods which a history of *les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* is alone capable of replacing. Voltaire is a historian of barbarism and religion who regards the latter as a principal cause of the former. His modern history begins with Charlemagne's reformulation of the western empire under papal auspices, so that he can show how the popes incessantly subverted the empire and how it was only the revival of the French monarchy which rendered possible enlightened civil government, the perfection of the arts, and the progress of commerce. Since the church is always the adversary – *le cléricalisme, voilà l'ennemi* – it is not merely the falsehoods of clerical historians, but the entire Christian history of God's actions among men, which must be attacked and subverted.

This is why the *Essai sur les moeurs* opens with chapters on China and India. Even more than Persia and Islam, these civilisations cannot be incorporated in a Christian scheme of history like that most recently and majestically set out in Bossuet's *Histoire universelle*.[91] That scheme separated sacred from gentile history, and made the former consist in that of the Old and New Dispensations. In the darkness following the Confusion of Tongues, God revealed himself in a series of compacts or covenants with the Hebrew patriarchs and with Israel as a gathered people at Mount Sinai. The Law was the mode of his presence, and the

[91] Ranum, 1976.

history of his people, in their worthiness and their unworthiness of their election, was the history of his actions in the world. There followed the history of Christ's mission in which Israel proved finally unworthy and was displaced by the Church Universal as the bearer of God's presence; but the Old and New Dispensations were inextricably interdependent. Voltaire, resolved that the church's claims to authority as the vehicle of God's presence were the main cause of the persistent barbarity of Europe and the unreadability of its history, decided to begin his rehabilitation of history with an assault on the Old Dispensation; that is, on Israel. Of Emilie du Chatelet reading Bossuet he reports:

> Ce qui la choqua le plus, ce fut de voir que ces trois ou quatre nations puissantes –
>
> the Chinese, Indians, Persians and Arabs –
>
> sont sacrifiées dans ce livre au petit peuple juif, qui occupe les trois quarts de l'ouvrage. On voit en marge à la fin du discours sur les Juifs cette note de sa main: 'On peut parler beaucoup de ce peuple en théologie; mais il mérite peu de place dans l'histoire.'
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> En effet, quelle attention peut s'attirer par elle-même une nation faible et barbare qui ne posséda jamais un pays comparable à une de nos provinces, qui ne fût célèbre ni par le commerce, ni par les arts, qui fut presque toujours séditieuse et esclave, jusqu'à ce qu'enfin les Romains la dispersèrent, comme depuis les vainqueurs mahométans dispersèrent les Parsis, peuple si supérieur aux juifs, long-temps leur souverain, et d'une antiquité beaucoup plus grande? . . .
>
> Enfin cette dame, d'un esprit si solide et si éclairé, ne pouvait pas souffrir qu'on s'étendit sur les habitants obscurs de la Palestine, et qu'on ne dit pas un mot du vaste Empire de la Chine, le plus ancien du monde entier, et le mieux policé, sans doute, puisqu'il a été le plus durable. Elle désirait un supplément à cette ouvrage, lequel finit à Charlemagne; et on entreprit cette étude pour s'instruire avec elle.[92]
>
> [What shocked her most was to see three or four mighty nations sacrificed in the course of this book to the petty Jewish people, who occupy three-quarters of its bulk. There can be seen in the margins of the section on the Jews this note in her handwriting: 'One may say much of these people in theology, but they deserve little place in history.'
>
> And indeed, what claim on our attention has a weak and barbarous nation, which never possessed a territory equal to one of our provinces, which was never renowned in commerce or the arts, which was almost always seditious and slavish, until the Romans dispersed it as later the Muslim conquerors

[92] *EM*, II, pp. 903–4.

dispersed the Parsis, a people greatly superior to the Jews, long sovereign over them, and of a far greater antiquity?

. . . And so this lady, of so solid and enlightened an intelligence, could not endure that one should write at length of the obscure dwellers in Palestine and say not a word of the vast empire of China, the most ancient in all the world and without doubt the best governed, since it has been the most lasting. She desired a supplement to this work, which ends with Charlemagne; and I undertook it in order to instruct myself in her company.][93]

Voltaire is insisting on the equal right of all nations to historical visibility, but at the same time telling us what it is that the historian is to find exemplary: extensive empire, power, duration, civility, commerce and the fine arts. It is the lack of all these which renders the Jews contemptible, and their possession of a unique religious literature does nothing to excuse them, since it is precisely this literature which has been used to render multicultural history invisible, and the Europeans barbarous and superstitious in the medieval centuries, aggressive and disputatious in the modern.

The function of China is thus to provide a counter-history capable of displacing the Judeo-Christian scheme. There is a body of rationally organised historical literature fully as reliable as that in the Hebrew Scriptures, but impossible to conflate with it as Assyrian and Egyptian scriptures had been conflated in the Christian science of chronology.[94] Behind this there is a body of myths and traditions giving an account of the world and its origins incompatible with that in Genesis; and not only is this account as plausible as any other, but it is absurd to suppose that God was not as concerned with a civilisation so ancient, and so capable of presenting its antiquity, as he was with the small and unprepossessing nation of the Jews. Voltaire begins to reveal his intentions, and the part which *les moeurs* are to play in the subversion of sacred history, when he describes Chinese civilisation as founded on a code of customary morality which does no more than organise the practices and rituals of social living; and he reveals that the primary objective of the *Essai* is a reconstruction of religion when – playing a card we have seen emerge from a pack dealt by the Jesuits – he insists that this civilisation subscribes to an undogmatic monotheism in which God is the creator of all men and requires no more of them than the practice of natural morality.[95] This history of *les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* is no more than the history of their successes and failures in observing these requirements,

[93] Trans. JGAP. It should be added that she is represented as equally contemptuous of Egyptian history and Bossuet's attention to it. [94] *EM*, I, pp. 205–8. [95] *EM*, I, pp. 218–22.

and the god to be worshipped is the common father of the *nations* whose *moeurs* and *esprit* history records.

Voltaire angrily denies the charge that the Chinese are atheists; he silently follows the Jesuits in ascribing the degeneration of Confucianism from its original theism to Taoist and Buddhist infections of which neither they nor he give a very clear account.[96] But where it had been Matteo Ricci's intention to restore his Chinese readers to a knowledge of the God of Abraham, of whom the natural religion of the gentiles had been an adumbration, Voltaire's intention was to restore natural religion itself, and exclude the monotheism of the Covenant as an absurd and selfish Jewish distortion, which the Jesuits had carried on in an equally unacceptable Christian form. The aim of historical study was to prove that there could be no chosen or peculiar peoples, no special revelations by God to his elect.

The insistence on Chinese theism which ushers in the *Essai* was developed by Voltaire, a few years later, into a full-length work, *La philosophie de l'histoire*, which he designed as a preface to the *Essai sur les moeurs* as the latter is an introduction to the *Siècle de Louis XIV*.[97] It is his major work on ancient history, and consists of a study of the religions of antiquity down to those of the Greeks and Romans, aimed to show that an undogmatic monotheism was the religion of all mankind except in so far as it had been corrupted by superstition and priestcraft. Read in the light of its opening chapters, and still more in that of *La philosophie de l'histoire*, the *Essai sur les moeurs* is a deist manifesto. We are going to find that the *Decline and Fall* is a sceptical manifesto, which is by no means the same thing. Whether any of the great works of eighteenth-century historiography can be called an atheist manifesto is another question. It is clear already, however, that 'the rebirth of modern paganism', as a twentieth-century historian has termed 'the Enlightenment',[98] entailed a fairly drastic rewriting of the history of ancient paganism, which must be made to appear as far as possible deist rather than polytheist, philosophical rather than animistic.

Voltaire, then, is engaged in reclassifying the monotheisms and rehabilitating the gentiles; he is intent on this task to the point where polytheism as an independent force in history scarcely figures in the *Essai sur les moeurs*, though in the *Philosophie de l'histoire* it is a somewhat different matter. The old distinction between the monotheism of natural religion, perceived by the gentile philosophers and corrupted by hea-

[96] *EM*, I, pp. 222–4. [97] Brumfitt, 1969. [98] Gay, 1966.

then superstition and priestcraft, and the monotheism truly revealed to the Hebrew patriarchs and enlarged by the Exilic prophets to become Christian messianism, is now reversed; to the natural deism based on the customs and morals (the *moeurs*) of all the Asian peoples, Voltaire opposes the unnatural monotheism of the Jews and Christians, who claim a relation with God peculiar to themselves and exclusive of all other civilisations, and on this basis set up rabbinates and churches which challenge the authority of civil society itself. To understand Voltaire's historical schema, we have next to understand how he proceeds to exile the Jews from civil history and civil society, while making society's quarrel with the Christian church the key to a history which can only be Eurocentric.

There is one monotheism not so far considered, unknown to primeval antiquity and coming upon the historical stage only after the advent of Christianity, so that it is at the height of its civilised power at the time of the coronation of Charlemagne, when Bossuet leaves off his history and Voltaire and du Chatelet resolve to begin theirs. This is the religion which proclaims that there is one God and that Muhammad is his Prophet, and Voltaire has a good deal to say about it in the *Essai*. Since the sixteenth century if not earlier, anti-clericals and freethinkers in the Christian west had been occasionally drawn to Islam by its lack of a clerisy organised independently of the civil power and its rejection of Christ's divinity and the Trinitarian doctrine, on which the claims of the church were based. Voltaire was well placed to depict Islam as the latest of the socially based and tolerant monotheisms distinguishing Asian from European history, and to give a correspondingly friendly account of Muhammad's career and personality. In libertine thought, the prophetic impostor was usually a benign legislator, driven to claim religious inspiration by the ineradicable superstition of the people to whom he preached. It was a problem for all would-be composers of treatises *de tribus impostoribus*[99] that Jesus had not been a legislator; but Muhammad, like Moses and many another, had been the author of a law, and could therefore be portrayed as an impostor in the great and benevolent tradition of natural deism. It was the prophets who spoke of another world, with values transcending those of this one, who were not to be forgiven. Voltaire denounced the 'bonzes' spreading the religion of Fo – under which name was comprised what little he knew about Buddhism – as impostors in this sense,[100] and must in the end choose between denouncing Jesus as another and demonstrating that he had been a

[99] See most recently Berti, 1992 and 1994. [100] *EM*, 1, p. 223.

preacher of natural morality whose role had been distorted by his successors.

Muhammad had been an impostor, but for that very reason had not set up a priesthood who imposed upon this world the kingdom of another. Voltaire presents Islam as a sociable and tolerant religion, whose offer to newly conquered unbelievers of 'the Koran, the tribute, or the sword' was made and observed in good faith. This is part of his systematic denial that Arab or Turkish, or any 'oriental' empire was a 'despotism'; and it enables him to glide over the evident fact, in contradiction to what he had written in the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, that Muslims were as anxious as Christians 'porter leurs opinions, comme leur commerce, aux deux extremités du globe'. It was as far from Spain to Kansu as from Ireland to Japan, and if the Christians had reached Luzon Islam had reached Mindanao. We observe the setting in which Voltaire praises among Muslims 'cette fureur des prosélytes' which he had criticised among Christians.

[P]ourquoi Mahomet et ses successeurs, qui commencèrent leurs conquêtes précisément comme les Juifs, firent-ils de si grandes choses, et les Juifs de si petites? Ne serait-ce point parce que les musulmans eurent le plus grand soin de soumettre les vaincus à leur religion, tantôt par la force, tantôt par le persuasion? Les Hébreux, au contraire, associèrent rarement les étrangers à leur culte. Les musulmans arabes incorporèrent à eux les autres nations; les Hébreux s'en tinrent toujours séparés. Il paraît enfin que les Arabes eurent un enthousiasme plus courageux, une politique plus généreuse et plus hardie. Le peuple hébreu avait en horreur les autres nations, et craignait toujours d'être asservi; le peuple arabe au contraire voulut attirer tout à lui, et se crut fait pour dominer . . .

Ces traits caractérisent une nation. On ne voit au contraire, dans toutes les annales du peuple hébreu, aucune action généreuse. Ils ne connaissent ni l'hospitalité, ni la liberalité,ni la clémence. Leur souverain bonheur est d'exercer l'usure avec les étrangers; et cet esprit d'usure, principe de toute lâcheté, est tellement enraciné dans leurs coeurs, que c'est l'objet continuel des figures qu'ils emploient dans l'espèce d'éloquence qui leur est propre. Leur gloire est de mettre à feu et à sang les petites villes dont ils peuvent s'emparer. Ils égorgent les vieillards et les énfants; ils ne réservent que les filles nubiles; ils assassinent leurs maîtres quand ils sont esclaves; ils ne savent jamais pardonner quand ils sont vainqueurs; ils sont les ennemis du genre humain. Nulle politesse, nulle science, nul art perfectionné dans aucun temps, chez cette nation atroce. Mais, dès le second siècle de l'hégire, les Arabes deviennent les précepteurs de l'Europe dans les sciences et dans les arts, malgré leur loi qui semble l'ennemi des arts.[101]

[How came it that Mahomet and his successors, who began their conquests

[101] *EM*, 1, pp. 260–1.

exactly like the Jews, how came it, I say, that they achieved such great things, and that the Jews did so little? Was it not because the Mussulmen took particular care, either by force or persuasion, to subject the vanquished to their religion? On the contrary, the Jews never admitted strangers to partake of their rites. The Arabian Mussulmen incorporated among them other nations; the Jews always kept themselves a distinct people. It appears in short that the courage of the Arabians was more enthusiastic, and their conduct more generous and bold. The Jews held all other nations in abhorrence, and were always afraid of being enslaved: on the contrary the Arabs wanted to bring all nations under them, and looked upon themselves as born to command.[102]

[These traits form the character of a nation. On the other hand, one can find, in all the annals of the Hebrew people, not a single generous action. They knew neither hospitality, liberality nor clemency. Their supreme happiness was to practise usury upon foreigners; and this usury, the origin of all meanness, is so rooted in their hearts that it is the continual theme of the figures of speech employed in the kind of eloquence which is their own. Their glory was to put to fire and sword the little towns on which they laid hold. They massacred old men and children; they spared only the young women. They murdered their masters when they were slaves; they knew no mercy when they were conquerors; they are enemies of the human race. No civility, no science, no art has been perfected at any time by this atrocious nation. But from the second century of the Hegira, the Arabs became the preceptors of Europe in the sciences and the arts, though their law may seem the enemy of the latter.][103]

The Arabs, conquering everywhere to make their god known to all mankind, are noble, whereas the self-serving and timid Jews, hugging their god to themselves, are a people of misanthropic slaves. By contrast, the proselytising imperialism of Islam is praised on at least three grounds: it exhibits the heroic virtues of warrior magnanimity; conversion and tolerance alike exhibit a sense of community with those the Arab (and Ottoman) empires conquer and incorporate; and extensive empire is capable of nurturing the sciences and perfecting the arts. In spite of all Voltaire's venom towards the Jews, the implicit contrast is that between Christian empire, in which missionaries export theological dispute and destroy native cultures, and Enlightened empire – like that of Catherine II of Russia, to whom the *Philosophie de l'histoire* is dedicated – of which the Khalifat is the prototype and which Voltaire thoroughly admires.

His respect for this sort of empire is displayed in his repeated, systematic and contemptuous denials that Confucian or Arab or Mogul

[102] Trans. Nugent, 1759, I, pp. 45–6. Nugent worked from a less complete text than appears in modern editions. [103] Trans. JGAP. Not in Nugent.

or Ottoman empire was despotic; Voltaire was an inveterate enemy (as Gibbon was not) of the myth or paradigm of 'oriental despotism'.[104] This image arose from many sources and long antedates the establishment of colonial rule by European over Asian peoples; it was being discussed in that context only towards the end of Voltaire's lifetime, when the British in India found themselves exercising Mogul-derived authority over large Muslim and Hindu populations. One of its sources was Herodotean; the disunited, quarrelsome, but nevertheless free Europeans saw themselves in the role of Hellenes, and the Ottoman sultan in that of the Achaemenid Great King, in a replay of the Persian wars. Another was Aristotelian: the insistance that barbarians, and Asians in particular, were slaves because they did not live under law, and thus because they were servile by nature. A third was Tacitean: the portrayal of Augustan rule as tyrannical because exercised from a palace governed by suspicion and the intrigues of women. The fourth and final step was taken by Montesquieu, when he characterised despotism as one of the three forms of government, and applied its 'oriental' characteristics to the monarchy of Louis XIV, which Voltaire was determined to defend. All these images expressed the fears of Europeans as much as their arrogance; their fears of Asians in the age of Ottoman domination, their fears of themselves in the age of the great modern monarchies. The central myth to which they gave rise was the thesis that Europeans were free because their Roman-Germanic land tenures gave them the freedom to appeal to laws, whereas in the Asian despotisms – the contrast is at least as old as the sixteenth century – the tenant was servile because he might at any moment be dispossessed at the despot's pleasure and no law gave him security. That this was so because he was servile by inherited nature or climatic conditioning was a next step very easily taken.

Voltaire fastened on these beliefs as products of Christian, and to a lesser extent neo-feudal, thinking. To stigmatise Confucian or Mogul or Ottoman government as despotic was linked in his mind with the Jesuit and Dominican falsehood of stigmatising the first-named as atheist, and he is not far from asserting that a truly despotic government is as impossible in nature as a society of genuine atheists. There are long – and in our eyes thoroughly admirable – passages in the *Essai* in which he insists that none of these empires can be despotisms, because they are exercised over huge and extensive agricultural populations and would

[104] For the history of this concept see Richter, 1974; Venturi, 1960, 1972, pp. 47–51 (originally published in 1960).

simply be unworkable if the cultivator were not assured that he will normally be left undisturbed.[105] Voltaire is as confirmed an enemy of the myths of oriental despotism and servility as Anquetil-Duperron and Edmund Burke and William Jones were to be after him; but it is not certain that he had followed them in laboriously acquiring a detailed knowledge of how Muslim and Hindu law actually worked. We may be reading a rhetoric of natural jurisprudence, in which it is asserted that human and social nature are such that government is impossible without the tacit consent of the governed, and without the proprietor's implicit faith in his relative security. And it is quite certain that Voltaire's deconstruction of 'despotism' pursues a domestic agenda; it is in part a polemic against those who employed the paradigm to discredit the absolute monarchy inherited from Voltaire's hero Louis XIV. The *Essai* is full of direct and indirect criticisms of the *Esprit des lois*,[106] whose author had in the *Lettres Persanes* supplied a vivid picture of 'oriental despotism' in the harem as well as the palace. Voltaire is anxious to unmake Montesquieu's triads, in which *honneur* but not *vertu* is the *principe des monarchies*, and these can easily degenerate into *despotismes* whose *principe* is simply *crainte*. He knew more than Montesquieu about terror in its judicial form and suspected that the whole construct of despotism had been invented to serve the *thèse nobiliaire*. Perhaps it was for the age of revolutions to prove him mistaken.

There is another – and to our eyes much less admirable – dimension to Voltaire's treatment of the Asian peoples and their history: a dimension of racial theory. The function of Chinese history in his scheme was to destroy the authority of Hebrew chronology and its accounts of the creation of the world and humanity; and with the biblical account went the origination of humanity from a single pair, whether Adam and Eve or Noah and his wife, with their sons, Shem, Ham and Japhet. This was a less momentous paradigm shift than at first sight appears, since complex and sophisticated narratives of human development could in fact be fitted into the Mosaic chronologies and Noachic genealogies; but its immediate consequences were nevertheless far-reaching. Voltaire, having overthrown one sacred text, had no desire to replace it by another, and cast about instead for a naturalist account of human origins and development. He accepted Buffon's thesis that the human race was an animal species, originating like any other – however that might have been, given the unformed nature of eighteenth-century palaeontology – but found Buffon and those like him unduly cata-

[105] *EM*, I, pp. 216–18 (China), 613 (Mongols), 824–5 (Ottomans); II, pp. 404–5 (Mogul), 409–11 (Persia), 782 (Mogul), 783–4 (China). [106] *EM*, I, p. 216, for a specific reference.

strophic and transformist in their histories of the earth's surface and the creatures living on it. In particular, Voltaire could never fully accept the thesis that geography had undergone enormous changes, with land and sea giving place to one another, and the fossils of ancient species appearing in places where they could not now have lived. He seems to have found this hard to reconcile with the benign and neutral god called for by his deism – at any rate before the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 – and smacking too much of repeated and unpredictable acts by the creator upon his creation. He was disposed to insist that the geophysical environment, and the biophysical configuration of the animal species including the human, had always been much as they now were, and that any changes and innovations occurring had been gradual and uniform, the working out of natural causes.

He therefore insisted that the human race was a species, subdivided into a number of physically distinct subspecies, and that the latter were genetically stable, the physical and humoral characteristics evolved in their various environments having become inheritable and ineradicable. In both the *Essai sur les moeurs* and the *Histoire de la Russie* he surveys the various peoples inhabiting the *terres arctiques* which lie between Europe and China, and stresses that the Lapps and other sub-polar peoples, physiognomically and culturally so unlike their Scandinavian and Slavic neighbours, must be thought of as an *espèce des hommes* formed by the climatic and physical characteristics of their environment.[107] There is to be no unitary creation of man in God's image; the deity is to operate through the mechanisms of nature in this as in all other respects. Voltaire does not deny that the races of mankind have migrated and conquered in one another's environments; Swedes and Russians are to be met with in the terrain of the Lapps and Yakuts, and find it possible to live there without modifying their acquired and inherited characteristics; but an image is taking shape of every human subgroup as originally autochthonous, indigenous, aboriginal or *tangata whenua*,[108] in the literal rather than the metaphorical sense of these terms, originally native to some environment which has made them what they are. And if these subgroups, *espèces* or races are genetically and culturally stable, what is to be said of the restlessness and mobility which has brought them, so destructively and so constructively, into contact and the consequences of contact with one another?

The *Histoire de la Russie* contains much invective against the folly of

[107] *OH*, pp. 359–61, 369–70; *EM*, II, pp. 140–1.
[108] This Maori term means 'peoples of the land or birthplace' (*whenua* = both land and placenta). See Pocock, 1992, where Gibbon's dissent is noted from an autochthony which may be Voltaire's.

those who employ biblical and Renaissance chronology in the attempt to establish a common, and especially a Noachic, genealogy for all the peoples of Eurasia.[109] The target, however, is not one of those 'antiquaries of profound learning and easy faith' satirised in a corresponding passage of the *Decline and Fall*, but a more formidable, enlightened and contemporary figure not mentioned by name: Joseph de Guignes, whose great *Histoire des Huns, Turcs et Mogols*[110] was of major importance to Gibbon. De Guignes, a leading member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, had obeyed the injunction its members laid on one another to study Chinese and Arabic sources as well as Greek, Latin and vernacular; he had acquired a reading knowledge of both the former languages in order to master the huge accumulations of books and documents building up in the *Bibliothèque du Roi*. The *Histoire des Huns, Turcs et Mogols* is the fruit of his labours, and because he obeyed the neo-classical injunction to recapitulate the narrative histories he had read, it contains a vast amount of the bloody and futile doings of bloody and futile khans and emirs: almost exactly – but for the lack of monks – the sort of history which Voltaire and Madame du Chatelet found *ennuyeux*, *petit* and *sauvage*. But de Guignes had a larger purpose, no more congenial to Voltaire and indeed aimed directly against him. He adhered to the Biblical account of the origins of mankind, and a major shift in his later writings was from the view that the Chinese were a distinctive people who had migrated directly from the plain of Shinar to the view that they were a colony of Egyptians who had arrived later and by a circuitous route.[111] De Guignes was not moved solely by orthodox devotion, though it suited Voltaire to pretend that he was; he wished to maintain the unity of human history, which he saw Voltaire as having denied. He further maintained, to Voltaire's fury, that Nestorian if not apostolic Christianity, like Sunni Islam and dimly-perceived Lamaistic Buddhism, had penetrated the closed Confucian world and made some changes there; he even considered that 'Fo', the name applied to the Buddha in what little the Jesuits knew about him from Chinese sources, had on occasion designated Jesus Christ when the Chinese heard of him and his teachings.[112]

[109] *OH*, pp. 341–4.

[110] De Guignes, 1756; Minuti, 1994, 1996. Gibbon's *Memoirs*, but not his journals, mention meeting him in Paris in 1763. [111] Adshead, 1984, pp. 113–27.

[112] See Pocock, 1990a. Voltaire's refusal to accept the Nestorian inscription from Sianfu stems from his argument with de Guignes. Gibbon noted Voltaire's position in one of his earliest Lausanne commonplace entries (BL Add. MSS. 34880, fol. 41v.), but came to disagree with it later (*EE*, p. 117; *Decline and Fall*, vol. IV, ch. 47; Womersley, II, p. 984; Bury, V, p. 160).

De Guignes had realised that Voltaire's strategy entailed representing the Confucian system as one altogether closed and self-contained, never interacting with the Christian universe or sharing a history with it. He therefore attacked – both because it furthered Voltaire's purposes and because he considered it bad history – the view that Chinese history consisted in the uninterrupted maintenance and transmission of the Confucian moral and political order. The circumstance that he was not primarily recounting the procession of the dynasties, as the Jesuits had done, but regarding Chinese history from the standpoint afforded by the turbulence and mobility of the nomad steppe,[113] aided him in interpreting it as contingent and unstable, and as linked with the history of India, Persia, Europe and Rome by the devastating but sometimes creative comings and goings of the Huns and Hsiung-nu, Kins and Khitai, Mongols and Manchus. He was further able to link this history with biblical and Renaissance narratives of the post-Babelic *Volkerwänderung* of the sons of Noah and their descendants, and to contrast a monogenetic, diffusionist and mobile account of human development – to which, in non-biblical terms, we have returned – with Voltaire's image of relatively static human populations, each evolved in its own environment and remaining stable there. De Guignes's surviving biblicism prevented his adopting Voltaire's incipient racialism. It was the latter, not the former, who wrote:

> On demande pourquoi les Chinois, ayant été si loin, dans des temps si reculeés, sont toujours restés à ce terme; pourquoi l'astronomie est chez eux si ancienne et si bornée; pourquoi dans la musique ils ignorent encore les demi-tons. Il semble que la nature ait donné à cette espèce d'hommes, si différente de la nôtre, des organes faits pour trouver tout d'un coup tout ce qui leur était nécessaire, et incapables d'aller au-delà. Nous, au contraire, nous avons eu des connaissances très-tard, et nous avons tout perfectionné rapidement. Ce qui est moins étonnant, c'est la crédulité avec laquelle ces peuples ont toujours joint leurs erreurs de l'astrologie judiciaire aux vrais connaissances celestes. Cette superstition a été celle de tous les hommes; et il n'y a pas long-temps que nous en sommes guéris; tant l'erreur semble faite pour le genre humain![114]

> [It is surprising that this ingenious nation never went beyond the elements of geometry, that they were ignorant of semitones in music, that their astronomy and all their sciences were at the same time so ancient and so limited. It seems as if nature had given to this species of men so different from ours, organs formed for discovering all at once what was necessary for them, and incapable of going further. We on the contrary have made discoveries very late; but we

[113] Minuti, 1994, 1996. [114] *EM*, I, p. 215.

have been quick to bring things to perfection. But what is less surprising is that these people have always blended the errors of judicial astrology with the truth of their heavenly observations. This has been a superstition adopted at one time or other by all mankind; nor is it long since we have recovered from it ourselves, such is the proneness of human nature to error.][115]

This is, of course, a casebook example of the genesis of the racial fallacy. It is not the proposition that human populations may be genetically distinct, but the proposition that these supposed differences may explain cultural diversities by explaining differences in mental capacity, when both the cultural and the intellectual differences are in fact fictitious constructs. Here one root of the fallacy is Voltaire's conviction that the perfection of the plastic arts is an index to the level of civilisation and enlightenment, and that the perfection of Greco-Roman art by neo-classical standards is the only form of perfection conceivable. In the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore there is a display of Ming and Ch'ing ceramics encrusted with gold and silver by Dutch and French artificers, and this – it is depressing to realise – is pretty certain to reveal what Voltaire had in mind. The Chinese capacity to create ceramics without embossing them is taken as a sign of instant and childlike aesthetic powers whose growth is then arrested; the Europeans, possessing the organs of a different race, mature more slowly but attain artistic perfection. De Guignes concurred

> qu'il regne chez les Chinois des défauts essentiels dans le Gouvernement, dans les Sciences et dans les Arts, qu'ils n'ont jamais sçu porter à un certain degré de perfection,[116]
>
> [that there obtain among the Chinese essential deficiencies in government, science and art, none of which have they known how to bring to a final perfection,][117]

but did not offer a racial explanation; his biblical monogeneticism may have held him back.

De Guignes had an image of Chinese history in mind, somewhat more complex than Voltaire's. Where the latter desired to stress the autonomy of Confucian *moeurs* to the point where they might seem static and unchanging, unaffected by history whether external or internal, de Guignes insisted that the Chinese had been a warlike and imperial people, in whose history might be found as many *révolutions* as in the history of Europe.[118] This perception was derived, however, from his

[115] Nugent, 1759, I, p. 17. [116] De Guignes, 1756, vol. II, p. 362. [117] Trans. JGAP.
[118] De Guignes, 1756, vol. I, pp. 76–7, vol. II, pp. 179–80.

study of the millennial fluctuations of Central Asian steppe culture, which in the times of the Hsiung-nu, the Jurchen, the Mongols and the Manchu had broken into Chinese history and modified its course, just as the Huns, the Avars, the Magyars and the Turks had done in the history of Europe. De Guignes did not supply Confucian history with an internal dynamic of its own, in which Ch'in or Han, T'ang or Sung, might appear periods of cultural transformation; nor – and in this he resembles other Enlightened historians of China – did he supply a history in which Buddhism had interacted with Confucian values as Christianity had with those of classical Rome. This is a noteworthy lacuna, since the Enlightened mind might so easily have supplied it. The Jesuits had followed their Confucian interlocutors in condemning and then playing down the roles of Taoism and Buddhism, to the point where these religions nearly disappeared; this is a major cause of the western image of Chinese history as unchanging and sterile.

Voltaire's image of Chinese and indeed Asian history is similarly derived from an external perspective. Of the 197 chapters of the *Essai sur les moeurs* approximately 45 – and of the 21 *rémarques* appended to it 3 – deal with history outside Europe; predominantly Asian, with ten chapters on pre-Columbian America and the European conquests, and Africa confined to the Mediterranean littoral. These chapters occur in groups which have the character of digressions; and after the first ten, which serve to subvert the Judeo-Christian scheme, it may be said that the peoples beyond Europe appear in history when they impinge upon the history of Europe (the Mongols, the Timurids, the Ottoman Turks) or the history of Europe upon them (the Crusades, the oceanic discoveries, the missions and commerce of the modern period). The *Essai* is Eurocentric, though not in the sense that it dismisses non-European civilisations from history. Voltaire excuses the dynamism of Islam on the grounds that it was imperial and tolerant, and in the Arab case civilising; he is anxious to praise the religious policy of Ottoman rule, and to deny that its empire, or that of the Chinese or Moguls, was despotic. He admires the Ch'ing emperors for their treaty with the Russians and their firm handling of the missionaries; and he supplies Ch'ing history with a dialectic – the last nomad conquest of China was also the assimilation of the last nomad power to Confucian culture.[119] An earlier chapter concludes by making a point to which Gibbon was to recur:[120]

[119] *EM*, II, pp. 790–1.
[120] *Decline and Fall*, vol. III, ch. 38 ('General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West'); Womersley, II, p. 512; Bury, IV, p. 177.

depuis que les Tartares d'Occident, ayant subjugué une seconde fois la Chine dans le dernier siècle, n'ont fait qu'un état de la Chine et de cette Tartarie orientale; depuis que l'empire de la Russie s'est étendu et civilisé; depuis enfin que la terre est herissée de remparts bordés de l'artillerie, ces grandes émigrations ne sont plus à craindre: les nations polies sont à couvert des irruptions de ces sauvages.[121]

[But since the eastern (*sic*) Tartars, after making a second conquest of China in the last century, have formed both China and their own country into one government; since the empire of Russia has been likewise enlarged and civilized; and, in a word, since the whole earth has been thick set with ramparts lined with artillery, these great migrations are no longer to be dreaded. Polite nations are sheltered from the irruptions of those savages.][122]

The Treaty of Nerchinsk, of which so much has been heard already, marks a turning-point in world history: the end of the intermittent power of central Asian nomadism; but the *Essai* remains Eurocentric in the sense that it is constructed around a history of Europe. The last group of Asian-oriented chapters – CXC to CXCVI, concluding with the destruction of Christianity in Japan – is followed by the last of the whole work: 'Résumé de toute cette Histoire jusqu'au temps où commence le beau siècle de Louis XIV'; and the reader of Voltaire's historical corpus, who has begun with the *Philosophie de l'histoire* and has recently been reminded of the *Histoire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, is redirected to the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, with which the grand pattern began and at which it ends: to the point where *perfectionnement* becomes possible.

Neither Chinese nor Islamic history is supplied with a scheme of historic development: a movement from past to present, from ancient to modern, from classicism to clericalism, from barbarism and religion to *la saine philosophie* and *le perfectionnement des arts*. These are the movements of European history, and this is the only scheme of history imaginable by Voltaire. He can use Chinese traditional history as a means of denying that his own culture is rooted in a unique sacred history of God's actions, but he can supply no other culture with a secular history as complex and dynamic as that he is about to attribute to Europe. No other culture has succumbed to Christianity and emerged into Enlightenment; in this sense, no other culture has a history. In his own words,

Enfin, de quelque peuple policé de l'Asie que nous parlions, nous pouvons dire de lui: Il nous a précédé, et nous l'avons surpassé.[123]

[121] *EM*, I, p. 809.
[122] Nugent, 1759, II, p. 206. He may have thought 'eastern' more correct than 'd'Occident'.
[123] *EM*, II, p. 412.

[In short, of any civilised people of Asia whom we consider, we may say: It preceded us, and we have surpassed it.][124]

[124] Trans. JGAP.

CHAPTER 8

The Christian millennium in Europe: the Essai sur les Moeurs

Voltaire does not supply us with his history of the ancient world, other than the accounts of Greek and Roman religion given in *La philosophie de l'histoire*. The ages of Pericles and Augustus form two out of four moments in the history of classical art, compared with which most history is not worth studying; but he must have had his perception of the rise and fall of pre-Christian Mediterranean civilisation, and it is not clear that he took any deliberate strategic decision not to write it. Nevertheless, the *Essai sur les moeurs*, predominantly a history set in Europe, begins as late as 800 AD, the year of Charlemagne's acclamation and coronation as emperor in Rome; and this is the moment later selected by Gibbon as marking the beginning of 'modern' as opposed to 'ancient' history.[125] The word 'modern' was (and is) protean in its many meanings; but Voltaire and Gibbon shared one set of reasons for introducing it at the accession of Charlemagne. His coronation by the hands of Pope Leo III, to the acclamations of an audience terming itself the *populus Romanus*, marked the beginning of that age in which papacy and empire strove to create and subject one another; and the circumstance that Charlemagne was already king of the Franks, established in what used to be Gaul, reminded the reader that neither the pope in Rome nor the emperor in Germany, but the *roi très chrétien* in Paris and Versailles, seemed – at least until the issue of the bull *Unigenitus* – to have triumphed in this millennial conflict and brought it to an end. Gibbon, however, resolved not to write a history with Latin Christendom at its centre, whereas Voltaire was in the last analysis interested in nothing else. He had a further set of reasons, at once crucial and idiosyncratic, for beginning his modern history where he did.

He tells us that the *Essai* was undertaken because Madame du

[125] *Decline and Fall*, vol. v, ch. 49; Womersley, III, p. 109; Bury, v, p. 286: 'The mutual obligations of the popes and the Carlovingian family form the important link of ancient and modern, of civil and ecclesiastical, history.'

Chatelet found medieval history unreadable and the actors in it barbarous and beneath contempt; and whatever was her role in the making of the work, there can be no doubt that Voltaire shared this perception. The work, we recall, opens:

> Vous voulez enfin surmonter le dégoût que vous cause l'histoire moderne . . . Vous ne cherchez, dans cette immensité, que ce qui mérite d'être connu de vous . . .[126]

It confronts the problem of showing why history not worth reading should nevertheless be read, and the history of Europe it presents is that of a transition to an age in which it became worth reading again. All *philosophe* historians – the adjective is used loosely here – confronted this problem; Bolingbroke thought his noble reader could quickly glean from medieval history all that was worth knowing, and the central problem of Gibbon is that of how he rejected the medieval west in favour of the even more alien history of the late antique and Byzantine east, and then recoiled from his own decision. Voltaire offers a solution of greater depth than Bolingbroke's, though it will be a question just how much depth it has. He offers his reader an *histoire des moeurs*, and the function of *moeurs* in the first place is to explain why the actors and authors in medieval history are contemptible and not worth studying, while in the second place it explains how their descendants recovered a dignity deserving narrative. The new *histoire des moeurs*, then, is not to substitute itself for the neo-classical narrative of deeds worthy of memory; it is in fact to restore that narrative; but renaissance, enlightenment and the transforming though not faultless monarchy of Louis XIV exist to perform the restitution of *moeurs* which is necessary before deeds are worth narrating again. The history Voltaire is now to write is in a sense a metahistory; it is about the loss and recovery of history in the neo-classical meaning of the term, contextualised within a history of culture but never subservient to it. His heroes Louis XIV and Peter I were unthinkable under medieval conditions, even under those of the wars of religion; he is writing the history of how he could have heroes again and write their history.

The primary problem is to determine why *moeurs* made everything *petit* and *sauvage* in the time of Charlemagne. Voltaire has already commented on the Christian error of exalting the petty and savage history of the Jews above the imperial and civilised history of the Chinese; he goes on to offer an explanation couched unequivocally if

[126] See above, p. 102.

not profoundly in terms of the conjunction between barbarism and religion. Julian the Apostate, a philosopher unequalled even by Marcus Aurelius, might have saved the declining Roman empire, but

> Deux fléaux détruisirent enfin ce grand colosse, les barbares, et les disputes de religion.[127]
>
> [Two scourges at length destroyed this great colossus: barbarians and religious dispute.][128]

The ensuing pages give us to understand that, wherever the barbarians came from (it does not matter very much), the Romans were unable to cope with them because they were engrossed in disputes over Christian theology, and in the fatal belief that these disputes determined the legitimacy of civil authority. Voltaire certainly considers all theology devoid of meaning, but the most disastrous story he has to tell is that of how this unmeaningness triumphed over civil reason and became the source of authority over society. An early step in his history of how this happened is to recount how

> Des disciples de Jean s'établissent d'abord dans l'Arabie voisine de Jérusalem, mais les disciples de Jésus vont plus loin. Les philosophes platoniciens d'Alexandrie où il y avait tant de Juifs, se joignent aux premiers chrétiens, qui empruntent des expressions de leur philosophie, comme celle du *Logos*, sans emprunter toutes leurs idées.[129]
>
> [A few disciples of John took up their residence in that part of Arabia nearest to Jerusalem; but Christ's disciples spread themselves all over the world. The Platonic philosophers of Alexandria, where there was such a multitude of Jews, joined the primitive Christians[130] . . . who borrowed the vocabulary of their philosophy, such as the Logos, without borrowing all their ideas.][131]

We have moved in two sentences from John the Baptist to John the Evangelist, bypassing Jesus himself. It is the Logos of the Fourth Gospel which marks the fatal conjunction between Christian prophecy and Platonic philosophy, and supplies the notion of the Incarnation, or perfected presence of the Word in the Flesh; and this in turn supplies the church with its claim to spiritual authority, and theology with the subject-matter of its unresolvable and unintelligible disputes. Every one of these becomes a dispute over the location of spiritual authority; the anarchy of the Fathers distracted the empire so long as the church was a republic of congregations or an aristocracy of bishops, but not long after

[127] *EM*, I, p. 303. [128] Trans. JGAP. [129] *EM*, I, p. 277. [130] Nugent, 1759, I, p. 55. [131] Trans. JGAP.

the Incarnate Word was invented at Alexandria an anonymous impostor at Rome invented the legends of the gift of the keys to Peter and his residence in that city as its bishop.[132] This became the foundation myth of the papal monarchy, whose growth preoccupies Voltaire and furnished the key to his understanding of medieval history, no less than it did for Giannone, with whose *Istoria civile* Voltaire was well acquainted.

The story moves rather rapidly through the episode of Leo the Isaurian and Pope Gregory II – Voltaire was concerned with Frankish and French history rather than Lombard and Neapolitan – to reach the coronation of Charlemagne, when the lines of medieval conflict were drawn and may be detected. The central question remains, however – or so we are assured – that of *les moeurs*, by understanding which alone can we understand why the history being narrated is apparently so unworthy of our attention; and here we have to ask whether the *moeurs* Voltaire presents as those of the ninth through twelfth centuries are anything more than the product of barbarism and religion, or more than an index to the gap between medieval degeneracy and enlightened politeness. He has an understanding of what barbarism is:

> Les habitants du Nord et de la Germanie étaient originairement des peuples chasseurs; et les Gaulois, soumis par les Romains, étaient agriculteurs ou bourgeois. Des peuples chasseurs, toujours armés, doivent nécessairement subjuguer des laboureurs et des pasteurs, occupés toute l'année de leurs travaux continuels et pénibles, et encore plus aisément des bourgeois paisibles dans leurs foyers. Ainsi les Tartares ont asservi l'Asie; ainsi les Goths sont venus à Rome. Toutes les hordes de Tartares et de Goths, de Huns, de Vandales et de Francs, avaient des chefs. Ces chefs d'émigrants étaient élus à la pluralité des voix; et cela ne pouvait être autrement; car, quel droit pourrait avoir un voleur de commander à ses camarades? un brigand habile et hardi, surtout heureux, dut à la longue acquérir beaucoup d'empire sur des brigands subordonnés, moins habiles, moins hardis et moins heureux que lui. Ils avaient tous également part au butin; et c'est la loi la plus inviolable de tous les premiers peuples conquérants. Si on avait besoin de preuves pour faire connaître cette première loi des barbares, on la trouverait aisément dans l'exemple de ce guerrier franc qui ne voulut jamais permettre que Clovis ôtât du butin général un vase de l'église de Rheims, et qui fendit le vase à coups de hache, sans que le chef osât l'en empecher.[133]
>
> [The inhabitants of the North and Germany were originally hunting peoples; the Gauls, subjected by the Romans, were agriculturists or town-dwellers. Hunting peoples, forever in arms, must necessarily subjugate husbandmen and herdsmen, occupied all the year round in continuous and painful labour, and

[132] *EM*, I, pp. 109–11. [133] *EM*, I, pp. 342–3.

even more so the peaceable townsmen at their firesides. Thus the Tartars enslaved Asia, and thus the Goths came to Rome. All the hordes of Tartars and Goths, Huns, Vandals and Franks had their chieftains. These leaders of emigration were chosen by the plurality of voices; it could not be otherwise, for what right has a robber to command his comrades? A bold and skilful brigand, above all a lucky one, might in the end acquire great authority over subordinate brigands, less able, bold and lucky than he. They took equal shares in the loot, and this is the one inviolable law among all primitive conquerors. If we seek proof of this primal law of barbarians, we find it in the tale of that Frankish warrior who would not abide that Clovis should set aside from the common pile a vase from the church at Rheims, but smashed it with a blow of his axe, the chieftain not daring to prevent him.][134]

This is not even the germ of those complex theses regarding the interactions between hunter, shepherd and farmer societies which were already well formed in Voltaire's time; not even of those older theses about the interactions between the barbarian war-band and the Roman *villa* to shape the origins of allodial or feudal tenures. Voltaire is interested in barbarism only in so far as it permits him to debunk the origins of the French monarchy by making Clovis a mere brigand chief, unworthy of the dove and the *sainte ampoule* of Rheims – there is a significant slip in the text here, since the vase of the story formed part of the loot of Soissons. His intentions are not subversive of the crown; he does not want the monarchy to have its origins in puerile superstitions; but *moeurs* have little value for him beyond the subversion of medieval narrative. There were scholars in his time well able to supply *moeurs* with a history, explaining them as the product of successive stages of law, or government, or even economy; but Voltaire was not much interested in being one of them. He mistrusted the study of medieval law as furnishing magistrates like Montesquieu with the materials for a *thèse nobiliaire*, and he would have none of Montesquieu's attempts to show that republics, monarchies and despotisms had each the *principes*, the *ressorts* and in short the *moeurs* appropriate to their character.[135] There is more about *moeurs* in the *Esprit des lois* than there is in the *Essai sur les moeurs*; to see them taking on a history in the latter work we must wait to see how medieval *moeurs* were transformed into those of the *beau siècle*.

The medieval scene is not uniformly degraded or caricatured; the rhetoric of historiography demanded the contrast supplied by occasional points of light, and Rollo of Normandy and Alfred of Wessex appear in the role of lawmakers.[136] There is even, but predictably, one

[134] Trans. JGAP. [135] *OH*, pp. 862–3. [136] *EM*, I, pp. 389–90, 392–3.

good Pope: Alexander III, who pronounced against slavery and made peace with the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa at Venice.[137] But the wars of papacy against empire, the spread of ecclesiastical and monastic jurisdiction, the unholy alliance between church and feudal power, make up not only the narrative but the *essai* itself; *moeurs* are what make all this possible and spring from it. There is a new source of priestly power and heretical protest against it in the growth of dispute over the nature of the Eucharist, which even the Fathers neglected to develop.[138] Giannone is one of Voltaire's guides in these chapters, and there is mention of the portrayal of Gregory VII in San Severino di Napoli; but he was more enthusiast than hypocrite.

L'Eglise, dont il fut le vengeur et le victime, l'a mis au nombre des saints, comme les peuples de l'antiquité déifiaient les défenseurs. Les sages l'ont mis au nombre des fous.[139]

[The church, whose cause he avenged, and to whom he died a victim, has ranked him in the number of saints, as the ancients used to place their defenders among the gods.[140] The wise have ranked him among the madmen.[141]]

Giannone and Gibbon could see Gregory as a great man, according to a certain vision of the world; but at this moment Voltaire bursts out in an invective not aimed even at priests and addressed to a 'vous' who have become the rulers of the earth.

Arrêtez-vous un moment près du cadavre exhumé de ce célèbre empereur Henri IV, plus malheureux que notre Henri IV, roi de France. Cherchez d'où viennent tant d'humiliations et d'infortunes d'un côté, tant d'audace de l'autre, tant de choses horribles réputées sacrées, tant de princes immolés à la religion: vous en verrez l'unique origine dans la populace; c'est elle qui donne le mouvement à la superstition. C'est pour les forgerons et les bûcherons de l'Allemagne que l'empereur avait paru pieds nus devant l'évêque de Rome; c'est le commun peuple, esclave de la superstition, qui veut que ses maîtres en soient les esclaves. Dès que vous avez souffert que vos sujets soient aveuglés par le fanatisme, ils vous forcent à paraître fanatique comme eux; et si vous secouez le joug qu'ils portent et qu'ils aiment, ils se soulèvent. Vous avez cru que plus les chaînes de la religion, qui doivent être douces, seraient pésantes et dures, plus vos peuples seraient soumis; vous vous êtes trompé; ils se servent de ces chaines pour vous gêner sur le trône, ou pour vous en faire descendre.[142]

[137] *EM*, I, pp. 515–6, 776. [138] *EM*, I, pp. 484–5.
[139] *EM*, I, p. 503. For the painting in San Severino, see I, p. 495.
[140] Nugent, 1759, I, p. 254. [141] Trans. JGAP. [142] *EM*, I, p. 505.

[Pause a moment before the unburied corpse of this great emperor Henry IV, less happy than our Henri Quatre king of France. Ask whence came so many humiliations and misfortunes on the one hand, so much insolence on the other; so many horrid deeds held sacred, so many princes sacrificed to religion. You will see the sole origin of all this in the populace; it is they who set superstition in motion. It was for the smiths and woodcutters of Germany that the emperor stood barefoot before the bishop of Rome; it is the common people, enslaved by superstition, who want to bring their masters under the same servitude. Once you have permitted your subjects to be blinded by fanaticism, they will force you to appear as fanatical as they are; and if you shake the yoke which they bear and love, they will rise against you. You thought that the more the chains of religion, which should be so soft, grew heavy and harsh, the more your peoples would submit to you. You were wrong; they will use these chains to burden you on the throne, or to drag you down from it.][143]

The people are more the authors of their superstition even than the priests are; but it is still the bishop of Rome who benefits by it. Voltaire seems to be warning some prince against fostering popular fanaticism in his subjects as a device to rule them by; but it is hard to tell who he has in mind, and hard to think of one – except Charles I of England? – overthrown by fanaticism alone, unaided by priestly power. Voltaire may be looking forward to the Wars of Religion, but if he looks back to pagan antiquity he is expected to discover a time when superstition was civil and benign. It is Christian doctrine, dogmatic dispute and spiritual authority which, for Voltaire as well as for Hobbes, threaten civil peace and the quiet mind; and the people did not invent these things for themselves.

The king most misled by fanaticism at this stage of Voltaire's story is St Louis of France. He has many virtues, among them those of a civil ruler:

Il avait, conjointement avec la régente, sa mère, qui savait régner, réprimé l'abus de la juridiction trop étendue des ecclésiastiques. Ils voulaient que les officiers de justice saisissent les biens de quiconque était excommunié sans examiner si l'excommunication était juste ou injuste: le roi, distinguant très-sagement les lois civiles auxquelles tout doit être soumis, et les lois de l'Eglise dont l'empire doit ne s'étendre que sur les consciences, ne laissa pas plier les lois du royaume sous cet abus des excommunications. . . . Quand on songe qu'il n'avait pas vingt-quatre ans lorsqu'il se conduisit ainsi, et que son caractère était fort au-dessus de sa fortune, on voit ce qu'il eût fait s'il fût demeuré dans sa patrie; et on gémit que la France ait été si malheureuse par ses vertus mêmes, qui devaient faire le bonheur du monde.[144]

[143] Trans. JGAP. [144] *EM*, 1, pp. 592–3.

[He had in conjunction with the regent his mother, who understood the art of government, given a check to the abuse of ecclesiastic jurisdiction. The clergy insisted that the civil officers should seize on the estates of excommunicated persons, without examining whether the excommunication was just or not. The king wisely distinguishing between the civil laws, to which the whole society ought to be subject, and the ordinances of the church, whose empire ought to extend only to consciences, would not suffer that the laws of the kingdom should give way to this abuse of excommunications . . .

If we reflect, that when the king behaved with such great prudence, he was only four and twenty years of age; and that his character was ever superior to his fortune, we may easily imagine what glorious things he would have performed, had he continued to reside in his own kingdom: and we shall be apt to lament that France was rendered so unhappy even by his virtues, which under a more prudent direction might have blessed the whole world.][145]

Misled by a rash vow, he goes on two disastrous Crusades, first to Egypt, where

on marchait contre le vieux et sage Mélecsala, soudan d'Egypte qui certainement n'avait rien à démêler avec le roi de France. Mélecsala était musulman; c'était là seul prétexte de lui faire la guerre. Mais il n'y avait pas plus de raison à ravager l'Egypte parce qu'elle suivait les dogmes de Mahomet, qu'il n'y en aurait aujourd'hui à porter la guerre à la Chine parce que la Chine est attachée à la morale de Confucius.[146]

[he marched against the old, the wise Melecsala, sultan of Egypt, who had certainly never given offence to the king of France. Melecsala was a Mussulman, and this was the only pretence for making war against him. There was certainly no more reason for ravaging Egypt, because it was inhabited by those who believed the doctrine of Mahomet, than there is at present for carrying a war into China, because the inhabitants of that empire are attached to the morals of Confucius.][147]

Voltaire is writing as if a universal *jus gentium* had been of force in the thirteenth century, as he probably thought it had. St Louis's second and fatal expedition to Tunis has even less to do with the objectives of the Crusades, and he may have been lured into it by his wicked brother Charles of Anjou, already master of Sicily by papal contrivance.[148] This occurs later in the history of the Crusades, which, while the last of the *Volkerwänderungen* which have disturbed Europe and Asia since the fourth century,[149] are at the same time a

[145] Nugent, 1759, 1, pp. 345–6. [146] *EM*, 1, p. 594. [147] Nugent, 1759, 1, p. 347.
[148] *EM*, 1, p. 560. [149] *EM*, 1, p. 568.

nouveau genre de vanité! Jamais l'antiquité n'avait vu de ces émigrations d'une partie du monde dans l'autre, produites par un enthousiasme de religion. Cette fureur épidémique parut alors pour la première fois, afin qu'il n'y eût aucun fléau possible qui n'eût affligé l'espèce humaine.[150]

[A new species of vanity! Antiquity never witnessed these migrations of one part of the world into another, produced by religious enthusiasm. This epidemic madness now appeared for the first time, that there might be no possible plague which had not afflicted the human race.][151]

Voltaire does not mention the Arab conquests of the sixth century, which even if not a mass migration were certainly produced by enthusiasm. A lay prophet who founds no priesthood may preach what Pope Urban VIII or Peter the Hermit may not, because he brings into the world an enthusiasm of the Word but not of the Substance. It is the erection of a system of authority founded on the institutionalised presence of invisible spirit which constitutes the unpardonable sin in Voltaire's eyes. When he comes to deal with the great conflict between Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII – a Pope far more obviously mad than Gregory VII – he reveals about half of his true objectives.

Vous avez déjà observé que depuis la mort de Charlemagne on ne vit aucun pontife de Rome qui n'eût des disputes ou épineuses ou violentes avec les empereurs et les rois; vous verrez durer jusqu'au siècle de Louis XIV ces querelles, qui sont la suite nécessaire de la forme de gouvernement la plus absurde à laquelle les hommes se soient jamais soumis. Cette absurdité consistait à dépendre chez soi d'un étranger: en effet souffrir qu'un étranger donne chez vous des fiefs; ne pouvoir recevoir de subsides des possesseurs de ces fiefs qu'avec la permission de cet étranger, et sans partages avec lui; être continuellement exposé à voir fermer par son ordre les temples que vous avez construits et dotés; convenir qu'une partie de vos sujets doit aller plaider à trois cents lieues de vos Etats: c'est-là une petite partie des chaînes que les souverains d'Europe s'imposerent insensiblement, et sans presque le savoir.[152]

[You have seen already that after the death of Charlemagne there never lived a Roman pontiff who had not disputes thorny or violent with emperors and kings; you are to see endure to the age of Louis XIV these quarrels which necessarily arise from the most absurd form of government to which men have ever been subjected. This absurdity consists in dependance upon a foreigner in one's own land, in permitting a foreigner to grant fiefs in one's own realm, in being unable to receive dues from one's feudatories without the same foreigner's permission and without sharing them with him; in being perpetually liable to see closed by his command churches which you built and endowed; in

[150] *EM*, 1, p. 560. [151] Trans. JGAP. [152] *EM*, 1, pp. 651–2.

conceding that one order of your subjects must go to plead suits three hundred leagues from your states. These are a small part of the chains which the sovereigns of Europe have imposed on themselves unthinkingly and almost without knowing what they were doing.][153]

'Vous' once again become 'les souverains d'Europe', and *moeurs* figure here as the impositions of custom and habit upon reason. But there is more than that to this absurd form of government, and Voltaire has not yet told us all he has in mind. With the end of the Hohenstaufen the French monarchy steps forward to confront the papacy, and wins the great but incomplete triumph of the removal of the Popes to Avignon. There ensue the disasters of the fourteenth century: the Hundred Years War, the Black Death, the Great Schism, followed by the Council of Constance and the Hussite wars; but by this time there is a change of scene, and Voltaire is ready to begin depicting the transformation of *moeurs* which are no longer the unmixed product of barbarism and religion – though he can still exclaim:

Quels temps! et nous nous plaignons encore du nôtre!

[Such were the times! and we still complain of ours!]

These words indicate the limits within which Voltaire was and was not a historian; but the chapters to which they belong show him developing a scenario in which *les moeurs* are formed and become civilised and enlightened; something he was not really able to do when they became and while they remained barbarous and medieval. He depicts their recovery as beginning in the fourteenth century and surviving its many horrors, and though on the whole the story he has to tell is to be laid in urban and courtly settings, Voltaire shared with the *Encyclopédistes* a perception that the useful arts both shared a history with the fine arts and had a history of their own. There is a narrative of material culture, which is not simply the work of the cultural elites.

On commençait en Italie, malgré tant de dissensions, à sortir de cette grossièreté dont la rouille avait couvert l'Europe depuis la chute de l'Empire romain. Les arts nécessaires n'avaient point péri: les artisans et les marchands, que leur obscurité dérobe à la fureur ambitieuse des grands, sont des fourmis qui se creusent des habitations en silence, tandis que les aigles et les vautours se déchirent.

On trouve même, dans ces siècles grossiers, des inventions utiles, fruit de ce

[153] Trans. JGAP.

génie de mécanique que la nature donne à certains hommes, très-indépendamment de la philosophie.[154]

[Towards the end of the thirteenth century, and in the beginning of the fourteenth, the Italians, notwithstanding their domestic dissensions, began to shake off that barbarous rust, with which Europe had been covered since the decline of the Roman empire. The necessary arts still subsisted: artificers and merchants whose obscurity preserves them from the ambition and fury of the great, may be compared to ants which silently make their nests, while eagles and vultures tear one another to pieces.

Even those rude ages produced some useful inventions, the effect of that mechanic genius with which nature endows particular men independently of philosophy.][155]

Gibbon was to consider the role of peasant and artisan inventiveness in ensuring that civilisation would survive the greatest of historical disasters.[156] Voltaire enumerates the inventions, in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and mainly in Italy, of eyeglasses, windmills, glass and paper manufacture, watches and the compass, and finally of chimneys.[157] All, even the windmill, are seen as facilitating the transport and consumption of non-essential commodities, and depend upon the growth of an urban society. Voltaire, who in the end prefers the civilising influence of courts to the virtue of republics, is none the less a republican in the middle ages and praises the great commercial cities of Italy:

on y vivait avec commodité, avec opulence; ce n'était que dans leur sein qu'on jouissait des douceurs de la vie. Les richesses et la liberté y excitèrent enfin le génie, comme elles élevèrent le courage.[158]

[the inhabitants lived with convenience, even with opulence, and enjoyed the sweets of life, while wealth and liberty excited the genius, as they elevated the courage of the nation.][159]

Voltaire has no time for Spartan or Roman (though he admired Dutch) frugality, and insists on the association of luxury with liberty; he tells us elsewhere[160] that the *bourgeois* in a feudal or monarchical power structure was still the *bourgeois* of his lord, whereas the Italian *bourgeois* was also a *cittadino* and belonged to himself and his city. The voice could be that of Pericles in the Funeral Oration, but we recall that the four

[154] *EM*, I, p. 757. [155] Nugent, 1759, II, p. 157.
[156] *Decline and Fall*, vol. III, ch. 38 (the 'General Observations'); Womersley, II, pp. 515–16; Bury, IV, pp. 179–81. [157] *EM*, I, p. 758. [158] *EM*, I, p. 761. [159] Nugent, 1759, II, p. 160.
[160] *EM*, I, p. 778.

great ages of art – those of Pericles, Augustus, the Medici and Louis XIV – are those in which the republic gave way to quasi-monarchical and then to royal and courtly power. It is not long before the *beaux-arts* take the place of the useful arts, and the paradigm of neo-classical *perfectionnement* reasserts itself. A loosely assembled romance vernacular was written even by the Emperor Frederick II, who used it to praise the chivalric graces of various nations.

Ce jargon se maintint malheureusement tel qu'il était en Provence et en Languedoc, tandis que sous la plume de Pétrarque la langue italienne attaignit à cette force et à cette grâce qui, loin de dégénérer, se perfectionna encore. L'italien prit sa forme à la fin du treizième siècle, du temps du bon roi Robert, grand-père de la malheureuse Jeanne.[161]

[This jargon has unfortunately continued in the same state it was then in Provence and Languedoc, while the Italian language, under Petrarch's direction, attained that force and elegance which, far from declining since, has received great improvements. The Italian assumed its present form towards the end of the thirteenth century, at the time of the good king Robert, father [*sic*] of the unfortunate Joan.][162]

Dante's *Divina Commedia*, 'poème bizarre, mais brillant de beautés naturelles', rose far enough above its time to serve as a worthy forerunner of Ariosto and Tasso; but it is of course Petrarch who stands out as restorer of the classical. One notes, however, that both Dante and Petrarch are cited in French, 'une faible traduction' of the former and 's'il y a de la témérité à l'imiter' of the latter;[163] and it is doubtful if Voltaire means that the Italian language continues *se perfectionner* after the formation of the literary epics. At a much later point, we are advised that the gothic barbarities persisting in Shakespeare debar him from the succession of neo-classical *perfectionnement*, while Tasso is so infinitely superior to Homer in refinement that it can only be a matter of time before the ancient poet is superseded altogether.[164] The whole thrust of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, of course, instructs us that French is now the language in which the ancients are to be outdone; but in the *Essai*, which is prelude to the *Siècle*, Italian culture is the vehicle of recovery. *Les moeurs*, in consequence, are once again comprised within the paradigm of the *beaux-arts*, *le goût* and *la politesse*, which can flourish only in urban and then in courtly and monarchic cultures.

[161] *EM*, I, p. 763. [162] Nugent, 1759, II, p. 162. [163] *EM*, I, pp. 763–4.
[164] *EM*, II, pp. 169–70.

L'Allemagne, la France, l'Espagne, tout ce qui n'était pas en Italie grande ville commercante, était absolument sans police . . .

Il ne faut pas croire que tout ait été sauvage: il y eut de grandes vertus dans tous les états, sur le trône et dans les cloîtres, parmi les chevaliers, parmi les ecclésiastiques: mais ni un saint Louis ni un saint Ferdinand ne purent guérir les plaies du genre humain. La longue querelle des empereurs et des papes, la lutte opiniâtre de la liberté de Rome contre les Césars de l'Allemagne et contre les pontifes romains, les schismes fréquents, et enfin le grand schisme d'Occident, ne permirent pas à des papes élus dans le trouble d'exercer des vertus que des temps paisibles leur auraient inspirées. La corruption des moeurs pouvait-elle ne se pas étendre jusqu'à eux? Tout homme est formé par son siècle: bien peu s'élèvent au-dessus des moeurs de son temps. Les attentats dans lesquels plusieurs papes furent entraineés, leurs scandales autorisés par un exemple général, ne peuvent pas être ensevelis dans l'oubli. A quoi sert la peinture de leurs vices et de leurs désastres? à faire voir combien Rome est heureuse depuis que la décence et la tranquillité y règnent. Quel plus grand fruit pouvons-nous retirer de toutes les vicissitudes recueillies dans cet Essai sur les Moeurs que de nous convaincre que toute nation a toujours été malheureuse jusqu'à ce que les lois et le pouvoir législatif aient été établis sans contradiction?[165]

[Germany, France, Spain, and indeed all but the great trading cities of Italy, had hardly any sort of civil government.

Yet we are not to imagine, that the inundation of barbarism was general; there were men of eminent virtue in all stations, on the throne, and in the cloister, among the laity as well as the clergy. But neither a S. Lewis, nor a S. Ferdinand, were able to heal the wounds that had disfigured humanity. The long quarrel between the emperors and the popes, the obstinate struggle which Rome made for her liberty, both against the German Caesars and the Roman pontiffs, the frequent schisms, and at length the great schism of the west, prevented the popes, who were elected in times of confusion, from practising such virtues as more peaceable times would have inspired. Might not the general corruption of morals reach even them? The character of men depends on the age they live in; few, very few, ever rise above the manners of the times. Neither the flagitious crimes into which several popes were hurried, nor their scandalous lives, though countenanced by general example, can be buried in oblivion. Of what use then is the description of their vices, and of their disasters? To shew the happiness of Rome, since it has been the seat of order and tranquillity. What greater benefit can we receive from the many vicissitudes of this general history, than to convince us that every nation has been unhappy, till the laws and the legislative power have been properly settled?][166]

This passage shows Voltaire's historical intelligence at its broadest and most subtle, yet the language is bivalent and the strategy mixed. Beneath the recognition that we do not rise above our age, and that

[165] *EM*, I, pp. 773–4. [166] Nugent, 1759, II, pp. 170–1.

moeurs exercise a primacy over *le génie*, 'nous' – it is not 'vous' this time – are being advised that even popes may govern great cities and benignly exercise *la police*. But it is permissible to suspect that the dissolution of the Jesuits, occurring some time after this text was written, may have seemed the greatest act of papal *police*, since it removed an order which threatened even papal sovereignty, as the popes and the Jesuits together had threatened the sovereignty of every other prince and republic in Europe. Judicial and legislative sovereignty, the passage concludes, is the only guarantee of civilising *moeurs* and *perfectionnement des arts*. The latter may be necessary to preconditions of sovereignty, but sovereignty establishes the only conditions under which they can survive.

Thirty-six chapters later we encounter the clearest statement of what it is that most threatens civil sovereignty in Europe. Voltaire has been recounting the ascendancy and the downfall of Savonarola, after the ejection of the Medici from civilised Florence, and finding it impossible to weigh the fraudulence of the prophet against the wickedness of the Borgia pope. He concludes:

Vous regardez en pitié toutes ces scènes d'absurdité et d'horreur; vous ne trouvez rien de pareil ni chez les Romains et les Grecs, ni chez les barbares. C'est le fruit de la plus infâme superstition qui eut jamais abruti les hommes, et du plus mauvais des gouvernements: mais vous savez qu'il n'y a pas longtemps que nous sommes sortis de ces ténèbres, et que tout n'est pas encore éclairé.[167]

[You look with pity on these scenes of absurdity and horror; you find nothing like them among the Romans, the Greeks, or the barbarians. They are the fruit of the most infamous superstition which has ever brutalised human beings, and of the worst of all forms of government; and you know that it is not long since we came out of this darkness, and that all is not daylight yet.][168]

If we may consider this the closest the *Essai sur les moeurs* ever brings us to a definition of what Voltaire meant when he wrote 'écrasez l'infâme', it should be noted that the imposition of papal upon civil authority can only be part of it. That without doubt is 'le plus mauvais des gouvernements', as earlier it was 'le plus absurde'; but the condemnation and the pity extend to Savonarola as well as to Alexander VI. The 'infâme superstition' includes the friar's claim to prophetic inspiration, his opponents' and his supporters' appeal to the ordeal by fire; it can hardly be less than the belief that God acts in the affairs of men, authorising and enjoining their actions. And Voltaire knows very well on what doctrines this belief is based among Christians; we have seen him deriving it from

[167] *EM*, II, p. 86. [168] Trans. JGAP.

the Johannine Logos and the Petrine supremacy. The former is that on which have been based the doctrine of the Incarnation and the disputes concerning Christ's nature. It can scarcely be unintended – though it is justified and even required by the historical record – that the chapter (cviii) on Savonarola is immediately followed by one on Pico della Mirandola, who also confronted Alexander VI; an intelligence which ought to have furthered the liberation of the arts, but succumbed instead to the metaphysics and mystifications of Platonism, of which of course the Logos was one more.

Mais la passion de la science universelle l'emportait; et cette science universelle consistait à savoir par coeur, sur chaque matière, quelques mots qui ne donnaient aucune idée. Il est difficile de comprendre comment les mêmes hommes qui raisonnent si juste et si finement sur les affaires du monde et sur leurs intérêts, ont pu se payer de paroles inintelligibles dans presque tout le reste. La raison en est qu'on veut paraître instruit plutôt que de s'instruire, et quand des maîtres d'erreurs ont plié notre âme dans notre jeunesse, nous ne faisons pas même d'efforts pour la redresser; nous en faisons au contraire pour la courber encore. De là vient que tant d'hommes pleins de sagacité, et même de génie, sont pétris d'erreurs populaires; de là vient que de grands hommes, tels que Pascal et Arnaud, finirent par être fanatiques.[169]

[But the passion for universal science prevailed: and this consisted in learning a few words by heart on every subject without any sort of meaning. It is difficult to conceive how the same men, who reason so justly and with such exactness in regard to the affairs of the world and their interests, could be satisfied in regard to almost every thing else, with gibberish and nonsense. It is because we want to appear learned, rather than to learn; and when once the mind has been warped by erroneous principles in our younger days, we use no endeavours afterwards to set it right, on the contrary we strive to confirm it in error. Hence it is that so many persons of wit and genius are led away by popular prejudices.[170] And hence it is that great men like Pascal and Arnaud end by being fanatics.][171]

This is only one, and by no means the most insightful, of many Enlightenment enquiries into how the philosophic mind might betray itself into the enthusiasm of the intellect. Voltaire's history is never triumphal; he knows that there is a path to superstition and fanaticism even from the gates of enlightenment; he can perceive at the foundations of his civilisation the Greek, Jewish and Christian errors persistently capable of perverting it. Not long before these treatments of

[169] *EM*, II, p. 88. [170] Nugent, 1759, II, p. 291. [171] Trans. JGAP.

Savonarola and Pico, there occurs one of the most anti-Jewish of his chapters, opening with the observation:

Ce peuple doit nous intéresser, puisque nous tenons d'eux notre religion, plusieurs même de nos lois et de nos usages, et que nous ne sommes au fond que des Juifs avec un prépuce

and concluding:

Quand leurs yeux furent un peu ouverts par d'autres nations victorieuses que leur apprirent que le monde était plus grand qu'ils ne croyaient, ils se trouvèrent, par leur loi même, ennemis naturels de ces nations, et enfin du genre humain. Leur politique absurde subsista quand elle devait changer; leur superstition augmenta avec leurs malheurs; leurs vainqueurs étaient incirconsis . . . ils gardèrent tous leurs usages, qui sont précisement le contraire des usages sociables. Ils furent donc avec raison traités comme une nation opposée en tout aux autres; les servant par avarice, les détestant par fanatisme, se faisant de l'usure un devoir sacré. Et ce sont nos pères![172]

[This people must interest us, since we derive from them our religion and not a few of our laws and customs, so that at heart we are no more than Jews with foreskins . . .

When their eyes were a little opened, and the victories of other nations had taught them that the world was bigger than they thought, they became, in obedience to their law, the natural enemies of these nations and of the whole human race. Their absurd polity persisted when it should have changed; their superstition grew with their misfortunes; their conquerors were merely the uncircumcised . . . they preserved all their customs, which are the antithesis of the customs of society. They were thus rightly regarded as a nation opposed to all others; serving them from avarice, they hated them from fanaticism, and made usury a sacred obligation. And they are our fathers!][173]

Voltaire's hatred of Jews is not racial, or even the hatred of an Other, so much as a hatred of that within his own civilisation which he most detested; almost a hatred of self. The next chapter deals with the other great homeless nation of Europe: the Romany people, today once again a problematic culture and an endangered species. Voltaire supposes that these 'Egyptians' are descended from the wandering priests of Cybele and Osiris, and can be traced back to the religion of ancient Syria and Egypt, which,

toute emblématique et toute vénérable dans son origine, était dès le temps de Cyrus un mélange de superstitions ridicules: elle devint encore plus méprisable sous les Ptolémées, et tomba dans le dernier avilissement sous les Romains; elle

[172] *EM*, II, p. 61. [173] Trans. JGAP.

a fini par être abandonnée à des troupes de voleurs. Il arrivera peut-être aux Juifs la même catastrophe: quand la société des hommes sera perfectionnée, quand chaque peuple fera le commerce par lui-même et ne partagera plus le fruits de son travail avec ces courtiers errants; alors le nombre des Juifs diminuera nécessairement. Les riches commencent parmi eux à mépriser leurs superstitions; elles ne seront plus que le partage d'un peuple sans arts et sans lois, qui, ne trouvant plus à s'enrichir par notre négligence, ne pourra plus faire une société separée, et qui, n'entendant plus son ancien jargon corrompu mêlé d'hébraïque et de syriaque, ignorant alors jusqu'à ses livres, se confondra avec la lie des autres peuples.[174]

[However emblematic and venerable in its origin, it was from the time of Cyrus a medley of ridiculous superstitions. It became even more contemptible under the Ptolemies, and reached the depths of debasement under the Romans; finally it was abandoned to roving bands of thieves. Perhaps the same catastrophe will befall the Jews. When human society has reached perfection, when each people conducts its own commerce and no longer shares the fruits of its labour with these rootless brokers, the number of Jews will necessarily diminish. The rich among them are beginning to despise their superstitions; these will be no more than the portion of a people without arts or laws, who, no longer able to grow rich through our negligence, will be no more able to form a separate society, and forgetting even their ancient and corrupted jargon – a medley of Hebrew and Syriac – ignorant at last even of their books, will be indistinguishable from the dregs of the other peoples.][175]

The paragraph has moved altogether from the caravans to the ghettoes; but Romany and Jews alike are presented as the cultural detritus of Christian civilisation, doomed to assimilation as that civilisation ceases to be Christian and is homogenised by commerce. In this prognostic, however, there is no need to enquire what will become of the Gypsies. The absorption and assimilation of the Jews is another matter, since Europe can only forget them by ceasing to be like them; *ce sont nos pères*, a *damnosa hereditas*. The perfection of society must mean the denial of its past, a past persistent in surviving.

[174] *EM*, II, pp. 66–7. [175] Trans. JGAP.

CHAPTER 9

The recovery of civil government, the rebirth of fanaticism and the return to the Siècle.

The second century of the *Essai sur les moeurs* – as we may term the 90 chapters and 21 appendices remaining from the point we have reached – are concerned with the history we term modern, in the sense that it is not medieval; with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that precede *le beau siècle de Louis XIV*. For Voltaire 'modern' was that which was not ancient, but he divided 'modern history' into an age of barbarism and religion, corresponding roughly to our 'medieval', and an age of recovery, *perfectionnement* and enlightenment, beginning with the rebirth of commerce and classical letters and culminating in the *beau siècle* and its aftermath. It used to be a convention of twentieth-century historiography that 'modern' history began in 1494 – 1492, being extra-European, was marginal – because Charles VIII's invasion of Italy marked the beginnings of the great rivalry between the French monarchy and the Spanish, Burgundian and Austro-German empire of Charles V, and so of the modern European states system which was the foundation of Rankean historiography. Voltaire, though the great wars in sixteenth-century Italy and Flanders are prominent in his story, is not an architect of this synthesis; perhaps because he was anxious to proceed to the great wars of the *siècle de Louis XIV* and the crisis of the Spanish succession, at the end of which the European system had been re-established by the Treaty of Utrecht. Voltaire is ambivalent, rightly enough, as to whether the peace of 1713 represents the triumph of Louis XIV's efforts to stabilise Europe by stabilising France, or the defeat of his excessive ambitions; but as a Frenchman, an upholder of the *thèse royale*, and in the end an admirer of the *roi soleil*, he goes out of his way to deny the common Anglo-Dutch contention that either Charles V or Louis XIV had the capacity – or, we are meant to infer, the intention – to establish a universal monarchy in Europe.[176]

[176] *EM*, II, pp. 189–90. For the spectre of universal monarchy, see Robertson, 1993a.

These are two centuries during which the powers of civilising kingship, and the *beaux-arts* which are both its index and its instrument, are steadily increasing but are incessantly distracted. War is a major distraction, but Voltaire sees it in a double perspective. On the one hand, he is quite clear that its devastations and vast expenditures are destructive of *la bonne police* and *le bonheur des peuples*; on the other, the fact that he can now recount coherent histories of coherent wars means that both these arts, and the powers of kingship which lie behind them, are attaining higher levels of perfection. War as the *ultima ratio regum*, however, is one thing; wars of religion are quite another, and formed the major obstacle to recovery.

Les disputes de religion qui agitèrent les esprits en Allemagne, dans le Nord, en France, et en Angleterre, retardèrent les progrès de la raison au lieu de les hâter. Des aveugles qui combattaient avec fureur, ne pouvaient trouver le chemin de la vérité. Ces querelles ne furent qu'une maladie de plus dans l'esprit humain. Les beaux-arts continuèrent à fleurir en Italie, parce que la contagion des controverses ne pénétra guère dans ce pays; et il arriva que, lorsqu'on s'égorgeait en Allemagne, en France, en Angleterre, pour des choses qu'on n'entendait point, l'Italie, tranquille depuis le saccagement étonnant de Rome par l'armée de Charles-Quint, cultiva les arts plus que jamais. Les guerres de religion étalaient ailleurs des ruines, mais à Rome et dans plusieurs autres villes italiennes l'architecture etait signalée par des prodiges. Dix papes de suite contribuèrent, presque sans aucune interruption, à l'achèvement de la basilique de Saint-Pierre, et encouragèrent les autres arts: on ne voyait rien de semblable dans le reste de l'Europe. Enfin la gloire du génie appartint alors à la seule Italie, ainsi qu'elle avait été le partage de la Grèce.[177]

[The religious disputes, in which the public were engaged in Germany, in the North, in France, and in England, retarded instead of forwarding the progress of reason. It was impossible for people that were blind, and fought like madmen, to find out the right road to truth. These quarrels were only one distemper more added to the human mind. The arts continued to flourish in Italy, because the pest of religious controversy had not penetrated into that country: and it so happened, that while they were cutting one another's throats in Germany, France, and England, for things they did not understand, Italy completely at rest, since the amazing event of the plundering of Rome, by the army of Charles V, applied herself more than ever to the improvement of the liberal arts. In other countries the religious wars were productive of barbarism and ruins; while Rome and several cities in Italy were displaying the wonders of architecture. Ten popes successively and almost without interruption, contributed to finish the church of St. Peter, and at the same time encouraged the

[177] *EM*, II, p. 173.

other arts. Nothing of the like kind was to be seen in the rest of Europe. In a word, Italy alone had then the glory of being the seat of genius and taste, a glory heretofore confined in Greece.][178]

This praise for the renaissance and baroque papacy – ten benevolent popes in succession certainly constitute a prodigy – is striking; it is worth noticing that Voltaire has Bernini's Rome in his mind's eye, whereas Gibbon a few years after has Piranesi's. Voltaire is following a complex of strategies: he wants to indicate that it is the spiritual power of popes over kings to which he has sworn undying enmity, not their temporal power as princes over their own dominions; there may be some correlation between a papacy reduced to government of the papal states, and the independence which he wants to see affirmed by the Gallican church; and this benign view of papal government as an instrument of domestic *police* may imply a widening of the gap between the See of Rome and the Society of Jesus. The era of the religious wars is one more explosion of the capacity of theological dispute over the location of spiritual authority to disrupt the peace of civil society, and the Jesuits steadily emerge as its principal beneficiaries and a threat to the authority of rulers greater even than the claims the Counter-Reformation popes make for themselves. How far it was the conscious strategy of mid-century Enlightenment to move the papacy towards dissolution of the Society is doubtless a large question; but as the *Essai* nears completion the contemptible historians against whom it is written are more and more often Jesuits.[179] The enlightened state was intended to be the heir of the Gallican, and to complete its work.

Papal claims to excommunicate and depose kings are of course only one face of the long and dreadful story of spiritual authority; the fanaticism which it engenders in the Pope's adversaries, and the no less extreme claims which it drives them to make, are as terrible in their way. Voltaire, no Protestant though an enemy of the church, has to decide on his attitude towards the leaders of Reformation. Luther was half a barbarian; Zwingli more admirable because his programme is nearly reducible to a re-assertion of civic authority; Calvin a scholastic and inquisitor as intolerant as his enemies.[180] Gustavus Vasa was a hero of his people; Henry VIII what anyone can see him to have been; Philip of Hesse a freak of nature, endowed with three where other men have only two.[181] Together with these there appear the formidable crowds who

[178] Nugent, 1759, III, pp. 43–4. [179] In particular Daniel and Maimbourg.
[180] *EM*, II, chs. cxxvii–cxxviii, cxxxiii–cxxxiv.
[181] *EM*, II, pp. 146–50, 232 (Gustavus), ch. cxxxv (Henry VIII), p. 233 (Philip).

followed Thomas Munzer and John of Leyden, and of whom Voltaire has things to say which we shall find Gibbon following[182] and which indicate the direction of Voltaire's understanding of Protestant history.

Ce sont les premiers enthousiastes dont on ait ouï parler dans ces temps-là: ils voulaient qu'on rebaptisât les enfants, parce que le Christ avait été baptisé étant adulte; c'est ce qui leur procura le nom d'*anabaptistes*... ils développèrent cette verité dangereuse qui est dans tous les coeurs, c'est que les hommes sont nés égaux; et que si les papes avaient traité les princes en sujets, les seigneurs traitaient les paysans en bêtes. A la verité le manifeste de ces sauvages au nom des hommes qui cultivent la terre, aurait été signé par Lycurgue: ils demandaient qu'on ne levât sur eux que les dîmes des grains; qu'une partie fût employée au solagement des pauvres; qu'on leur permît la chasse et le pêche pour se nourrir; que l'air et l'eau fussent libres; qu'on moderât leurs corvées; qu'on leur laissât du bois pour se chauffer. Ils réclamaient les droits du genre humain; mais ils les soutinrent en bêtes féroces.[183]

[These were the first enthusiasts mentioned in those times; they condemned infant baptism, and rebaptised those that entered into their communion, because Christ was baptised at full age; and this is what gave them the name of anabaptists. They developed this dangerous truth which is implanted in every breast, that mankind are all by nature equal, and that the pope, it is true, used to behave to princes as to his subjects, but that the nobility treated the peasants as brutes.[184]

[It is true that the manifesto of these savages who cultivated the earth under the name of men might have been signed by Lycurgus. They demanded that no more than a tithe of grain produce should be levied upon them; that part of it should be used for the relief of the poor; that they should be allowed to hunt and fish to maintain themselves; that air and water should be free; that their labour dues should be lessened; that they should be allowed wood for their fires. They claimed the rights of the human race; but they asserted their claims like wild beasts.][185]

There follows much harrowing detail of how they slaughtered and were slaughtered.

Cependant la secte subsiste assez nombreuse, cimentée du sang des prosélytes, qu'ils appellent *martyrs*, mais entièrement différente de ce qu'elle était dans son origine: les successeurs de ces fanatiques sanguinaires sont les plus paisibles de tous les hommes, occupés de leurs manufactures et de leur négoce, laborieux,

[182] *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. 13; Womersley, I, pp. 363–4; Bury, I, pp. 383–4.
[183] *EM*, II, pp. 236–7. [184] Nugent, 1759, III, p. 96.
[185] Trans. JGAP; not in Nugent. (Cf. *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch.13: 'They asserted the natural rights of men, but they asserted these rights with the most savage cruelty.')

charitables; il n'y a point d'exemple d'un si grand changement: mais comme ils ne font aucune figure dans le monde, on ne daigne pas s'apercevoir s'ils sont changés ou non, s'ils sont méchants ou vertueux.

Ce qui a changé leurs moeurs, c'est qu'ils se sont rangés au parti des unitaires, c'est-à-dire de ceux qui ne reconnaissent qu'un seul Dieu, et qui, en révérant le Christ, vivent sans beaucoup de dogmes et sans aucune dispute; hommes condamnés dans toutes les autres communions, et vivant en paix au milieu d'elles. Ainsi ils ont été le contraire des chrétiens: ceux-ci furent d'abord des frères paisibles, souffrants et cachés, et enfin des scelérats absurdes et barbares. Les anabaptistes commencèrent par la barbarie, et ont fini par la douceur et la sagesse.[186]

[Nevertheless this sect persists in considerable numbers, strengthened by the blood of the first converts, whom they call martyrs;[187] but entirely different from what it was originally: the successors of those bloody fanatics are the most peaceable set of people in the world; intirely intent upon their trade and manufactures; extremely industrious and charitable. There is no instance in history of so great a change: but as they make no figure at present in the world, the public do not trouble their heads to inquire whether they are changed or not, whether they are wicked or honest men.[188]

[What has changed their manners is that they have joined the ranks of the unitarians, that is to say those who recognise only a single God, and while revering Christ, live with few dogmas and no disputes; men condemned by all other communions and living in peace in their midst. Thus they have been the opposite of the Christians, who began as a peaceable, persecuted and concealed brotherhood, and became absurd and barbarous criminals. The anabaptists began as barbarians and ended in gentleness and wisdom.][189]

Voltaire is not the only Enlightened writer – Hume comes to mind and will recur in his proper place – to be interested in the transition from fanaticism to rational quietism, or in the reverse direction. This is the first time in these writings, however, that he has explicitly suggested that the secret may lie in the transition from patristic and Nicene orthodoxy to some form of unitarianism, and that this was the inner logic of the Protestant reformation; the only means by which it sometimes evolved from a mere recrudescence of fanaticism, as dangerous as its papal opposite, to an instrument of enlightenment. The crooked paths by which this evolution took place are explored in his study of Calvin's savage persecution of Michael Servetus, who, initially a physician anticipating Harvey,

[186] *EM*, II, p. 240. [187] Trans. JGAP. [188] Nugent, 1759, III, pp. 99–100.
[189] Trans. JGAP. The absence of this passage from Nugent's translation should be noted.

négligea un art utile pour des sciences dangereuses; il traita de la préfiguration du Christ en le verbe, de la vision de Dieu, de la substance des anges, de la manducation supérieure: il adoptait en partie les anciens dogmes soutenus par Sabellius, par Eusèbe, par Arius, qui dominèrent dans l'Orient, et qui furent embrassés au seizième siècle par Lelio Socini, reçus ensuite en Pologne, en Angleterre, en Hollande.

Pour se faire une idée des sentiments très-peu connus de cet homme, que sa mort barbare a seule rendu célèbre, il suffira peut-être de rapporter ce passage de son quatrième livre de la Trinité: 'Comme le germe de la génération était en Dieu avant que le fils de Dieu fût fait réellement, ainsi le créateur a voulu que cet ordre fût observé dans toutes les générations. La semence substantielle du Christ, et toutes les causes séminales et formes archetypes, étant véritablement en Dieu, etc.' En lisant ces paroles, on croit lire Origène; et, au mot de Christ près, on croit lire Platon, que les premiers théologiens chrétiens regardèrent comme leur maître.[190]

[. . . neglected an useful profession for dangerous studies. He took it into his head to write about the prefiguration of Christ in the verb, the hypostatic union, the divine vision, the substance of angels, and the superior manducation: particularly he adopted the ancient dogmas of Eusebius and Arius, which having been predominant in the East, were embraced in the sixteenth century by Lelio Socini, and afterwards by great numbers in Poland, England, and Holland.[191]

[To give some idea of the little-known opinions of this man, renowned only for his barbarous execution, it will perhaps suffice to repeat this passage from his fourth book on the Trinity: 'As the germ of generation was in God before the Son of God was really created, so the Creator has willed that this order shall be observed in all species of generation. The substantial seed of Christ, and all seminal causes and archetypal forms, being veritably in God', and so on. Reading these words, one might be reading Origen; and on the subject of Christ especially, one might be reading Plato, whom all the first Christian theologians considered their master.][192]

Yet from this tissue of Platonist, patristic and scholastic nonsense, the seedbed of all those conflicts between orthodox and heterodox substantialisms which seem to constitute *l'infâme*, Servetus extracted the unitarianism which was the cause of his death and, by a historic irony, the means of escape from the false philosophy which generated both fanaticism and persecution. Voltaire enunciates one of the favourite myths of Enlightenment, which the succession of Turretini *fils* to Turretini *père*[193] had made more than a myth:

Il semble aujourd'hui qu'on fasse amende honorable aux cendres de Servet; de

[190] *EM*, II, p. 244. [191] Nugent, 1759, vol. III, p. 103. [192] Trans. JGAP; not in Nugent.
[193] *EEG*, p. 70.

savants pasteurs des églises protestantes, et même les plus grands philosophes, ont embrassé ses sentiments et ceux de Socin: ils ont encore été plus loin qu'eux; leur religion est l'adoration d'un Dieu par la médiation du Christ. Nous ne faisons ici que rapporter les faits et les opinions, sans entrer dans aucune controverse, sans disputer contre personne, respectant ce que nous devons respecter, et uniquement attachés à la fidelité de l'histoire.[194]

[One would think that they are now endeavouring to appease the *manes* of Servetus. Many learned pastors, and great philosophers, of the protestant communion, have embraced Servetus's sentiments and those of Socinus. Nay, they have gone further: their religion is the adoration of one God, by the mediation of Christ. But for our part we only relate facts and opinions, without entering into religious controversy, without disputing against any body, paying respect where it is due, and intirely attached to historical fidelity.][195]

Voltaire is finessing the *Encyclopédie*'s claim that Geneva has become a wholly Socinian city,[196] but he is endorsing the thesis that the evolution of Protestantism was towards a deism with which his own found little need to quarrel. But it was a twisted path, not a broad highway. Of the English anabaptists who appeared under Edward VI he says:

ce qui est extraordinaire, c'est que se croyant chrétiens, et ne se piquant nullement de philosophie, ils n'étaient réellement que des déistes: car ils ne reconnaissaient Jésus-Christ que comme un homme à qui Dieu avait daigné donner des lumières plus pures qu'à ses contemporains. Les plus savants d'entre eux prétendaient que le terme de *fils de Dieu* ne signifie chez les Hébreux qu'*homme de bien*, comme *fils de Satan* ou de *Bélial* ne veut dire que *méchant homme*. La plupart des dogmes, disaient-ils, qu'on a tirés de l'Ecriture, sont des subtilités de philosophie dont on a enveloppé des vérités simples et naturelles: ils ne reconnaissaient ni l'histoire de la chute de l'homme, ni le mystère de la Sainte-Trinité, ni par conséquent celui de l'Incarnation . . . Ils pensaient suivre l'Evangile à la lettre; et en mourant pour leur secte ils croyaient mourir pour le christianisme: bien différents en cela des théistes ou des déicoles, qui établirent plus que jamais leurs opinions secrètes au milieu de tant de sectes publiques.

Ceux-ci, plus attachés à Platon qu'à Jésus-Christ, plus philosophes que chrétiens, fatigués de tant de disputes malheureuses, rejetèrent témérairement la révélation divine dont les hommes avaient trop abusé, et l'autorité ecclésiastique dont on avait abusé encore davantage. Ils étaient répandus dans toute l'Europe, et se sont multipliés depuis à un excès prodigieux, mais sans jamais établir ni secte ni société, sans s'élever contre aucune puissance. C'est la seule religion sur la terre qui n'ait jamais eu d'assemblée, celle dans laquelle on a le moins écrit, celle qui a été la plus paisible; elle s'est étendue partout sans aucune communication: composée originairement de philosophes qui, en suivant trop leurs lumières naturelles, et sans s'instruire mutuellement, se sont

[194] *EM*, II, p. 247. [195] Nugent, 1759, III, p. 105. [196] *Encyclopédie*, art. 'Genève'.

tous égarés d'une manière uniforme; passant ensuite dans l'ordre mitoyen de ceux qui vivent dans le loisir attaché à une fortune bornée, elle est montée depuis chez les grands de tous les pays, et elle a rarement descendu chez le peuple. L'Angleterre a été de tous les pays du monde celui où cette religion, ou plutôt cette philosophie, a jeté avec le temps les racines les plus profondes et les plus étendues; elle y a pénétré même chez quelques artisans, et jusque dans les campagnes. Le peuple de cette île est le seul qui ait commencé à penser par lui-même; mais le nombre de ces philosophes agrestes est très-petit, et le sera toujours: le travail des mains ne s'accorde point avec le raisonnement, et le commun peuple en général n'use ni abuse guère de son esprit.[197]

[but what is very extraordinary, while they imagined themselves to be Christians, and never troubled their heads about philosophic disputes, they were in reality mere deists; for they looked upon Christ only as a man, to whom God had vouchsafed to grant a purer ray of light than to his contemporaries. The most learned of their sect pretended that the term *the son of God* signified, among the Hebrews, no more than *a good man*, as the son of Satan or Belial implies only *a bad man*. Most of the dogmas, they said, that have been extracted from scripture, are philosophic subtleties, with which the plain truths of the law of nature have been involved. They neither believed the history of the fall of man, nor the mystery of the Trinity, nor of course the incarnation . . .

They fancied they were literally conforming to the gospel; and to die for their persuasion, they thought was the same as dying for Christianity: very different in this respect from the deists, who spread their secret opinions more than ever, in the midst of such a multitude of public sects.

The deists, rather attached to Plato than to Christ, rather philosophers than christians, tired of so many unhappy disputes, had the temerity to reject divine revelation, which mankind abused too much, and human authority, which they abused still more. They were spread all over Europe, and have multiplied prodigiously since then, without rebelling against the higher powers. It is the only religion in the world that never had any assembly, the religion on which the least has been written, the religion the most peaceable. Without any communication it has extended itself on every side. Originally it was composed of philosophers, who following too closely the light of reason, and never communicating their thoughts to each other, have all strayed the same way: thence it proceeded to the middle order, that is, of those who have leisure and fortune, till it reached the higher rank in most nations: but it rarely has descended to the common people. Of all countries, England is the place where this religion, or rather philosophy, has taken the deepest root. It has penetrated among artisans, and even among the country people. The inhabitants of this island are the only nation that have begun of themselves to think. But the number of those rustic philosophers is, and always will be, very small; for manual labour and reasoning do not well agree: and, in general, the common people can hardly be said either to use or abuse their understanding.][198]

[197] *EM*, II, pp. 262–3. [198] Nugent, 1759, III, pp. 120–21.

Voltaire is telling a tangled story. Deism has its origins both in that self-secularisation of sectarian enthusiasm of which Hume (whom he read) had more to say, and in an unrelated underground of free-thinking *libertins* sprung up spontaneously throughout a Europe disgusted by too much war and disputation. More clandestine than the *république des lettres* – for these philosophers do not even communicate with each other – freethinking was originally Platonist without being Christian, where Servetus was Platonist but merely heretical; it had a long way to go before shedding the Platonist metaphysics which were the root cause of the whole disastrous debate over the divine nature. It was a class phenomenon, since property and leisure are necessary conditions of reflection; with the very marginal exception of England, the working people must be left to choose between their ingrained superstition and their occasional more dangerous fanaticism and enthusiasm, which lead them to demand the rights of man with the savagery of beasts. The image of England silently governed by an open (and occasionally popular) conspiracy of freethinkers – minds of the stamp of Toland, Collins and Bolingbroke – may have been imparted to Voltaire by the last-named, and the Gibbon family could have enlarged and corrected his information. He goes on to sound a warning against 'un athéisme funeste, qui est le contraire du théisme', disseminated from Italy by Lucretians – not, as far as this text reveals, from the Netherlands by Spinozists.

Cette opinion pernicieuse s'établit chez les grands

– we have just been told that deism is the religion of those of middling fortune –

en Angleterre et en France: elle eut peu de cours dans l'Allemagne et dans le Nord, et il n'est pas à craindre qu'elle fasse jamais de grands progrès. La vraie philosophie, la morale, l'interêt de la société, l'ont presque anéantie: mais alors elle s'établissait par les guerres de religion; et des chefs de parti devenus athées conduisaient une multitude d'enthousiastes.[199]

[This pernicious opinion gained ground among the great in England, and in France; it made but very little progress in Germany and the North; and there is no great danger that it will spread very wide. Sound philosophy, ethics, and the interest of society have almost destroyed it; but at that time it grew strong by means of the wars of religion, when a multitude of enthusiasts were influenced by atheistical leaders.][200]

[199] *EM*, II, p. 264. [200] Nugent, 1759, III, p. 122.

It is hard to be sure that Voltaire really believed that atheism had become extinct with the ending of the wars of religion; his eye may be deliberately focused on the freethinkers of the age preceding his own. But the history of those wars was still to be written, and would carry him to the transition from the *Essai sur les moeurs* to the *Siècle de Louis XIV*. He proceeds to a group of chapters on what we term Counter-Reformation Catholicism: the Council of Trent, the Inquisition, the revival by Sixtus V of the papal claim to the deposing power, and centrally the proliferation of new religious orders. Here he feels obliged to go back to the primitive church in search of the origins of

La vie monastique, qui fait tant de bien et tant de mal, qui a été une des colonnes de la papauté, et qui a produit celui par qui la papauté fut exterminée dans la moitié de l'Europe;[201]

[The monastic life, that source of so much good and so much mischief, which gave birth to the very person by whom the papacy was exterminated out of one half of Europe,][202]

evidently Luther, who had many of the faults of the cloister but had at least left it to marry a refugee nun. It is not long before we discover that central objection of Enlightenment to the monastic life: that monks do not labour (and should not when they do) and that monks and nuns do not procreate.

Tous les Etats chrétiens étaient inondés, au commencement du seizième siècle, de citoyens devenus étrangers dans leur patrie, et sujets du pape. Un autre abus, c'est que ces familles immenses se perpétuent aux dépens de la race humaine. On peut assurer qu'avant que la moitié de l'Europe eût aboli les cloîtres, ils renfermaient plus de cinq cents milles personnes. Il y a des campagnes dépeuplées; les colonies du nouveau Monde manquent d'habitants: la fléau de la guerre emporte tous les jours trop de citoyens. Si le but de tout législateur est la multiplication des sujets, c'est aller sans doute contre ce grand principe que de trop encourager cette multitude d'hommes et de femmes que perd chaque Etat, et qui s'engagent par serment, autant qu'il est en eux, à la destruction de l'espèce humaine.[203]

[the several states of Christendom were over-run with people, who were become foreigners in their native country, and subjects of the pope. Another abuse was, that those numerous families were perpetuated to the detriment of the human species. We may safely aver that before one half of Europe had

[201] *EM*, II, p. 279.
[202] Nugent, 1759, III, p. 138. Note the omission of the 'colonnes de la papauté'.
[203] *EM*, II, p. 281.

suppressed the religious houses, they contained above five hundred thousand souls. And yet there are whole countries depopulated; the colonies of the new world want inhabitants; and the scourge of war sweeps away too many of our fellow creatures. If every legislator ought to aim at the increase of his subjects; it is certainly running counter to this grand principle to give too great encouragement to such a multitude of men and women who are lost to each state, and who, as much as in them lies, engage by oath to destroy the human species.][204]

The legislators of Voltaire's time were still active in the good work of returning as many celibates as possible to their natural social function of labour (in more than one sense of the word). Monks had taken the place of Jews as enemies of the human race;[205] the latter only cut themselves off from the rest of humanity, but the former did what they could to deny it existence. And an indefinitely increasing population was necessary to that multiplication of goods, ideas and *moeurs* in general which safeguarded the future of Enlightenment. *Compelle intrare*. But Jesuits are worse than regulars; the chapter 'Des ordres religieux' is interwoven with an account of the rise and progress of the Society, 'ce mélange d'enthousiasme et de souplesse', which,

s'ils ont été enfin chassés de la France, de l'Espagne et du Portugal, et détruits par un pape cordelier, malgré le quatrième voeu qu'ils faisaient au saint-siège,

have not lost – because it is not in the nature of religion that they should –

cet esprit qui les exila de plusieurs pays, et qui les remit en crédit.[206]

[if they have been at last expelled from France, Spain and Portugal, and destroyed by a Cordelier pope, despite that fourth vow which they made to the Holy See . . . that spirit which exiled them from several countries and yet restores their credit.][207]

The destruction of the Jesuits, not quite complete as Voltaire was completing his text, was never as satisfying a triumph as the *philosophes* could have wished. Perhaps they were never happy without their adversaries; on the other hand, they may have sensed that the Society might be suppressed, but not eradicated. At this point, the *Essai* embarks on a long series of chapters devoted to the oceanic explorations and Asian and American conquests of the Portuguese and the Spaniards, a process

[204] Nugent, 1759, III, pp. 140–1. [205] *EM*, II, p. 924. [206] *EM*, II, pp. 289–90.
[207] Trans. JGAP.

qui semblait plus utile au monde, mais qui ensuite ne fut pas moins funeste.[208]

[that seemed more useful, but afterwards proved not less pernicious to mankind.][209]

It is from the outset unclear what part colonisation and conquest played in that regrowth of commerce which was necessary to the *siècle de perfectionnement*, and it is noteworthy that this group of chapters concludes with a long and vivid narration of that fascinating, ambiguous, but to the Enlightened mind deeply satisfying episode, the rise and fall of the Jesuit quasi-state in Paraguay. Its extinction was the prelude to that of the Society itself:

Et la terre a appris enfin qu'on peut abolir tous les moines sans rien craindre.[210]

[And the earth has at last learned that it is possible to abolish all monks without fear of the consequences.][211]

A further group of chapters deals with the Asian and Muslim empires, from China to Morocco, at the time of the European conquest of the oceans, and brings us back to the empire of Charles V at the moment when it passed to Philip II. The narrative now is that of the great extent and persistent instability of the European monarchies in the first age of the religious wars: Philip's Spain confronting the revolt of the Netherlands, the Valois monarchy confronting itself, England and Scotland undergoing their dynastic and religious changes. The rise of the Dutch republic presents the paradox of republican austerity and commerce; despite their formidable and growing world trade,

ce peuple, pendant plus de quarante ans, ressembla aux Lacédémoniens, qui repoussèrent toujours le grand roi. Les moeurs, la simplicité, l'égalité, étaient les mêmes dans Amsterdam qu'à Sparte, et la sobriété plus grande . . . Jamais peuple ne connut moins la délicatesse . . . Mais la Haye devint, sur la fin de la vie de Maurice, et dans le temps de Frédéric-Henri, un séjour agréable, par l'affluence des princes, des négociateurs, et des guerriers. Amsterdam fut par le seul commerce une des plus florissantes villes de la terre; et la bonté des pâturages d'alentour fit la richesse des habitants des campagnes.[212]

[For the space of forty years these people resembled the Lacedemonians, who constantly repulsed the great king. The same manners, simplicity, and equality, prevailed in Amsterdam as in Sparta; with greater sobriety . . . Never was there a people less acquainted with delicacy . . . But towards the latter end of prince

[208] *EM*, II, p. 303. [209] Nugent, 1759, III, p. 162. [210] *EM*, II, p. 393.
[211] Trans. JGAP. [212] *EM*, II, pp. 449–50.

Maurice's days, and in the life-time of Frederick-Henry, the Hague was grown a most agreeable residence, by the great concourse of princes, statesmen, and general officers. Amsterdam rose by trade alone to be one of the most flourishing cities in the world; while the fertility of the neighbouring pastures enriched the inhabitants of the open country.][213]

For all the benign power of *le doux commerce*, Voltaire cannot quite envisage the arts which are his index to enlightenment developing in any but a courtly and princely setting. But the age of great civilising monarchies is not yet; he has to make his way through the grim story of the last Valois in the French wars of religion, the last Stuarts in the English and Scottish, and the second phase of such wars in Europe which reduces Germany to the point of being 'un pays presque sauvage'.[214] There are, as we should expect from the author of the *Henriade*, many pages in praise of Henry IV;[215] his conversion to Catholicism is admired precisely because it did not spring from conviction;[216] but he remains a gallant and gothic figure, a good-hearted provincial noble who leads his troops into battle in the same manner as Gustavus Adolphus. Richelieu, a jealous and suspicious figure with much of the tyrant about him, conducts the affairs of a nation whose *moeurs* are still barbarous and whose learning scholastic. When the wars of the British Isles are recounted, it is observable that Voltaire, a partisan of the *thèse royale* in French history, is a Whig when interpreting English; he is unlikely to have ranked Clarendon with Guicciardini and Sarpi, and his authorities were probably Rapin de Thoyras, Bolingbroke and – to judge from a late allusion[217] – Hume. Cromwell is another transitional figure; an enthusiast probably deceived by his own hypocrisies, he was a great prince in war and statecraft. Voltaire tells an unlikely tale that he used to join with a circle of *théistes* in ridiculing the Independents.[218] We have reached the verge of the *beau siècle de Louis XIV*, and the *Essai* is close to becoming a mere tidying up of loose ends. An anglophone reader's eye is caught by the account given of the reign of Charles II, which ought to have been – but of course was not – an age of enlightenment, in which a court restored after a frenzy of civil and religious strife set about *l'adoucissement des moeurs* by means of *le perfectionnement des arts*. In so far as such things happened in England – and they did – they were not in the control of Charles II's court; we move towards the *Lettres philosophiques* where they are the product of English liberty; and Voltaire brings us

[213] Nugent, 1759, III, pp. 270–1. [214] *EM*, II, p. 649.
[215] *EM*, II, ch. clxxiv and nine *additions* (pp. 559–66). [216] *EM*, II, pp. 538–40.
[217] *EM*, II, p. 909. [218] *EM*, II, p. 683.

close to thinking that, though the courts of Europe mostly strove to imitate Versailles, Louis XIV was alone in marshalling his court to transform the *moeurs* of a whole culture. Concerning England's role in enlightenment, he has something else to say, which we have heard before:

le théisme, dont le roi faisait une profession assez ouverte, fut la religion dominante au milieu de tant de religions. Ce théisme a fait depuis des progrès prodigieux dans le reste du monde. Le comte de Shaftesburi, le petit-fils du ministre, l'un des plus grands soutiens de cette religion, dit formellement, dans ses *Caractéristiques*, qu'on ne saurait trop respecter ce grand nom de *théiste*: une foule d'illustres écrivains en ont fait profession ouverte; la plupart des sociniens se sont enfin rangés à ce parti. On reproche à cette secte si étendue de n'écouter que la raison, et d'avoir secoué le joug de la foi: il n'est pas possible à un chrétien d'excuser leur indocilité; mais la fidelité de ce grand tableau que nous traçons de la vie humaine ne permet pas qu'en condamnant leur erreur on ne rende justice à leur conduite. Il faut avouer que, de toutes les sectes, c'est la seule qui n'ait point troublé la société par des disputes; la seule qui, en se trompant, ait toujours été sans fanatisme; il est impossible même qu'elle ne soit paisible. Ceux qui la professent, sont unis avec tous les hommes dans le principe commun à tous les siècles et à tous les pays, dans l'adoration d'un seul Dieu; ils diffèrent des autres hommes en ce qu'ils n'ont ni dogmes ni temples, ne croyant qu'un Dieu juste, tolèrant tout le reste, et découvrant rarement leur sentiment: ils disent que cette religion pure est aussi ancienne que le monde, qu'elle était celle du peuple hébreu avant que Moïse lui donnât un culte particulier; ils se fondent sur ce que les lettrés de la Chine l'ont toujours professée: mais ces lettrés de la Chine ont un culte public; et les théistes d'Europe n'ont qu'un culte secret, chacun adorant Dieu en particulier, et ne faisant aucun scruple d'assister aux cérémonies publiques: du moins il n'y a eu jusqu'ici qu'un très-petit nombre de ceux qu'on nomme *unitaires* qui se soient assemblés; mais ceux-là se disent chrétiens primitifs, plutôt que théistes.[219]

[Theism, openly professed by the King, was the religion dominant among so many others. This theism has since made extraordinary progress in the rest of the world. The third earl of Shaftesbury, grandson of the minister, one of the chief upholders of this religion, expressly says in his *Characteristics* that one cannot respect too highly the great name of 'theist'; a swarm of distinguished writers have professed it openly, and most Socinians have come to be of this party. This widespread sect is reproached with respecting reason alone and shaking off the yoke of faith. It is impossible for a Christian to excuse their disobedience, but fidelity to this great portrayal we are constructing of human life does not permit us, while condemning their error, to fail in doing justice to their conduct. We must avow that of all sects this is the only one which has not

[219] *EM*, II, pp. 687–8.

troubled society with disputes; the only one which, even in deceiving itself, has always been without fanaticism. It is actually impossible that it should not be peaceful. Those who profess it are joined with all men in the principle common to all ages and societies, the worship of a single God. They differ from other men in that they have neither dogmas nor temples, believing only in a just deity and tolerating all beliefs while rarely making known their own. They say that so pure a religion is the most ancient in the world, having been that of the Hebrew people before Moses gave it a particular form of worship. They take their stand on the doctrine which the literati of China have always professed; but the Chinese scholars have a public ritual, while the theists of Europe have only a secret religion, each worshipping God in privacy while never scrupling to take part in public ceremonies. That is to say, there is at present only a very small number of those who are called unitarians who assemble openly, and these call themselves primitive Christians rather than theists.][220]

Voltaire is making a myth out of England as he did out of Geneva; but he knows that he has to deal with a Protestant as well as a Parisian Enlightenment, and that the former was self-detheologising, very likely helped along by a *libertin* underground but consisting essentially in the movement through Socinianism to unitarianism to deism, very probably of a freemason kind. This may account for whatever distinction he draws between the 'theism' of this passage and the 'deism' of anabaptists who have become unitarians. He does not tell the full story as we have followed it in earlier chapters; he says that the Netherlands debate between Gomarists and Arminians

fut semblable en plusieurs points à cette des thomistes et des scotistes, des jansénistes et des molinistes, sur la prédestination, sur le grâce, sur la liberté, sur des questions obscurs et frivoles, dans lesquelles on ne sait pas même définir les choses dont on dispute.[221]

[The dispute was in many respects similar to those of the Thomists and Scotists, or of the Jansenists and Molinists, concerning predestination, grace, liberty, and other obscure and frivolous articles, where they know not how to define the very subject about which they dispute.][222]

There is not much sign of a movement from Arminianism to Socinianism; but he knows that there is a Protestant history to be related, and there is little sign that he saw any way of deducing a French or Catholic *théisme* from the debates among Jansenists, Jesuits and Gallicans. Whether there is a way of providing Parisian Enlightenment with a theological taproot this book has not attempted to enquire.[223] Voltaire

[220] Trans. JGAP. [221] *EM*, II, p. 729. [222] Nugent, 1759, IV, p. 207.
[223] See now Van Kley, 1996.

offers none, and therefore explains it solely in terms of king and court, commerce, philosophy and *le perfectionnement des arts*. We are brought *jusqu'au temps où commence le beau siècle* by a concluding group of chapters[224] which survey the empires beyond Europe, from Russia before the advent of Peter the Great to Japan after the violent, as opposed to the Chinese peaceable, elimination of Christianity. A concluding résumé observes that if in Asia there is nothing like the power of disputed dogma to disturb civil society, neither is there anything resembling a free *noblesse* or the relative liberty of women.[225] There have to be reasons why Europe, the wrestling ground of barbarism and religion, is also the home of enlightenment and has overtaken the civilised Asians after lagging so long behind them. If there had been no *infâme* we could never have crushed it.

[224] cxc to cxcvi. [225] *EM*, II, pp. 806–8.

CHAPTER 10

Voltaire: the exasperating predecessor

The achievement of Voltaire's historical *oeuvre*, when viewed in its totality, is enormous if it is not gigantic. By this verbal distinction is meant that its scope is more impressive than its structure, and this is why Gibbon came to consider it superficial; Voltaire, he once remarked, 'casts a keen and lively glance over the surface of history'.[226] This judgment is less dismissive than perhaps it was intended to be. There is a sense in which it was Voltaire's purpose to direct attention to the surface, and point out that it was full of detail to which insufficient attention had been paid; this detail, moreover, added up to *les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, the fabric of sociability in which human life and its history went on, and which he meant to mobilise and make central, in order to eliminate what he considered the false profundities of revelation and metaphysics that had been used to distort its nature. In this sense Voltaire's superficiality was deliberate and designed to redirect the intelligence; *le superflu, chose très nécessaire*. The main sequence of his histories, however, was not a mere mosaic of details or an encyclopedia of useful knowledge; he despised detail, no doubt to excess, when it got in the way of the swift narrative generalisations and paradoxes he enjoyed putting forward, and this is a point at which Gibbon's charge of superficiality recurs. It must be grasped that, though the *Essai sur les moeurs* is technically not a history, but the essay it describes itself as being – of the same order as Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* or William Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* – it is a vastly ambitious and largely accomplished essay in the construction of historical macronarrative, the pioneer presentation of that 'Enlightened narrative' with which this volume is concerned. The narrative is conceived in terms of the changing character of *moeurs*, for the polemical and ideological purposes we have begun to note.

[226] *Decline and Fall*, vol. v, ch. 51, n. 55; Womersley, III, p. 252; Bury, v, p. 446.

The substance of the narrative is the fall from ancient culture (of which Voltaire has not much to say) into feudal and clerical power – barbarism and religion in their specifically Latin forms – followed by the emergence of 'Europe' from the 'Christian millennium' into what we recognise as 'Enlightenment' and Voltaire calls *la saine philosophie* and *le perfectionnement des arts*. He begins his narrative with Charlemagne, five centuries later than does Giannone, partly because this is the point at which Bossuet, whom he desires to refute, left off, and partly because Charlemagne and Pope Stephen are the creators of the historical conditions from which the *siècle de Louis XIV* marks the final escape. Voltaire passes over – without neglecting – Italian Renaissance in favour of French Enlightenment as marking the exit from the Christian millennium, and his age of barbarism and religion includes the wars of Catholic and Protestant as well as those of papacy and empire. The French monarchy – Angevin, Valois and Bourbon – emerges as *tertium gaudens* from both conflicts; but its victory and its self-emancipation are not complete, and from the moment of *Unigenitus* there are indications that the work is to be carried on by the *philosophes* rather than the kings and their ministers. Voltaire's history begins at this point to interact with that of Hume and others formed by Protestant Enlightenment, who regarded French cultural supremacy with a different eye and whose programmes in irreligion took a different shape. If – the statement has been made[227] but is questionable – the *Essai sur les moeurs* ends on a note of optimism for the future of Enlightenment, it is because Voltaire has hopes for the silent triumph of a deism which need not take an organised or institutional form. Diderot had other views, and Gibbon others again.

Voltaire's history is Eurocentric, Latinocentric and Gallocentric, to the point where there is little to be learned from it about German history, less about Bohemian, Hungarian or Polish history, and nothing whatever about the history of Orthodox Christianity in Byzantium or Russia. The reason is that he is writing history, and developing a 'philosophic' understanding of history, out of the quarrel between Latin Europe and its successively ascending pasts, and that quarrel currently took the form of a confrontation between French and English ways of dealing with it. When Germans arrived at a perception of their place in a history still Latin, it would be as a result of their own pursuit of self-understanding and they would write a new kind of history; if this

[227] Pat Rogers, in Yolton, Porter, Rogers, Stafford *et al.* (eds.), 1991, p. 221.

was beginning to happen within the lifetimes of Voltaire and Gibbon, neither had much occasion to know of it. But if Voltaire's historical world-view is formed west of the Rhine and the Adige, he takes a lead, which Gibbon was to follow, in expanding its global perspectives. We have seen that there were a number of reasons for this. He had seen that Chinese history, and in a different way Islamic, could be used to give gentile history equality of status with that of the old or the new Israel, and so to deconstruct the *histoire universelle* which made sacred history the centre of secular. He could not, however, supply either Chinese or Arab-Turkish history with a narrative structure, since all the pasts out of which he organised his narrative were phases in the relations between the Christian church and Roman, post-Roman and post-clerical civil government; even *les moeurs* were rather consequences of these than the *ressorts* or *principes* which moved them. Voltaire did not write Chinese or Islamic history because he had neither the need nor the means of doing so. We are not sure he thought of these civilisations as having a 'history' at all, and his interest in them was mainly destructive.

He moved outwards from Latin European history in other ways. He shared the widespread perception that the history of Gothic, Saxon and German 'barbarism' in the making of Europe could not be separated from that of the Eurasian nomad peoples beyond it; and he shared – at a rather low level – the perception that this was a matter of understanding how the *moeurs* of shepherd peoples differed from those of agriculturalists. But his history of Huns, Turks and Mongols – to use the title of de Guignes's work which exceeded his knowledge – was bound up with another, of more contemporary concern: the history of the expanding Russian state, whose transformation, by Peter and currently by Catherine, had created the vision of an extension of Europe and of Enlightenment. It was a problematic vision, as wild talk by Rousseau had underlined; nobody knew whether Catherine's Russia would prove enlightened or despotic, or whether peasant and nomad rebellions would succeed in overthrowing it (we share this uneasiness again). No less problematic, and here for reasons intimately part of Enlightenment, was the enlargement of Europe into the oceans and the Americas, to which Voltaire also paid attention. The *philosophes* knew that this expansion was driven by two forces, religion which they detested and commerce which they adored; and one may look ahead from the *Essai sur les moeurs* to the *Histoire des Deux Indes*, in which this contradiction was to be chaotically explored. Once native Americans were typified as 'savages', encounter with them was to replicate on a global scale all those prob-

lems of nature, society and history with which Rousseau had begun tormenting the *philosophes* and himself. Closer to 'Europe', meanwhile, there is a footnote in which Voltaire remarks that his history was written before Bengal was conquered by the English.[228] The Anglo-French wars were destroying the states system of Enlightenment by enlarging it into a contest for empire, and the *Decline and Fall* was to be published between 1776 and 1788, during the next round of these wars, and in the interval between the American and French revolutions. The global expansion of Europe shook it at its still recent foundations, and this shock is communicated to Enlightened historiography.

It is impossible to believe that the reading of Voltaire's historical *oeuvre* was of other than vast importance to Gibbon, whenever and by what stages he carried it out. No other work, not even Montesquieu's, can have displayed the Enlightened narrative to him with such breadth and fullness, or shown how it could be constructed by means of a history of manners at once erudite and philosophical. References to the *Histoire générale* abound in the *Decline and Fall*, and there are occasions when a Voltairean point is taken up and pursued in Voltairean language; the observation that rebellious serfs pursue justifiable grievances with unjustifiable ferocity is one of these. But almost every reference to Voltaire is an expression of irritation and dissatisfaction, and an impressive *Schimpflexikon* could be compiled by cataloguing them. They run from the early

> M. de Voltaire, unsupported by either fact or probability, has generously bestowed the Canary Islands on the Roman empire[229]

– a little unfair, since Voltaire had claimed no more than that Roman ships had touched there[230] – to the late

> In his way, Voltaire was a bigot, a religious bigot;[231]

and these complaints are not limited to the *Decline and Fall*, since the militia journal tells us that Gibbon expected to find the *Siècle de Louis XIV* superficial and gives us his critical examination of the reasons why he did so. It does not seem enough to suggest that he had an oedipal need to cast off Voltaire as an Old Man of the Sea; the references convey a continuing exasperation with a historian who has promised more than he can deliver and delivered more than he can demonstrate. The criticism, not peculiar to Gibbon – Robertson will be found formulating

[228] 'Resumé de cette histoire'; *EM* II, p. 808n.
[229] *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. I, n. 87; Womersley, I, p. 54; Bury, I, p. 28.
[230] *EM*, II, ch. cxli.
[231] *Decline and Fall*, vol. VI, ch. 67, n. 13; Womersley, III, p. 916; Bury, VII, p. 146.

it[232] – is of course directed against Voltaire's lack of erudition. It is not that he has not read omnivorously and perceptively, but that he does not marshal his reading in a self-critical form which can be shared with others; we do not know what sources he is using or how he is using them, and consequently cannot share his judgment or rely upon it. The imagination and the judgment, Gibbon once wrote, were the salient qualities of the scholar and consequently the historian; and the judgment must be openly exercised, in a context of shared knowledge and shared language, before it could be of value or of use. If Voltaire would not share his sources or his methods with others, it became doubtful whether he respected their judgment or even his own; Gibbon thought he often leaped to a conclusion because he would rather express it than arrive at it.

This was a question of erudition; Gibbon came to suspect the greatest – even Montesquieu, even Bayle[233] – of following philosophy at the expense of facts. It was a question of reliability, but not altogether of objectivity; Gibbon knew what it was to see a beautiful hypothesis killed by a fact, but we are not on that account to see him as a Rankean before his time, or involve him in that most sterile of debates. His defence of erudition against philosophy, in the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*, had been a philosophical defence; he had wanted to vindicate the imagination and the judgment as faculties of the mind and ways of understanding the universe; and he had written that one of the pleasures of critical reading was the opportunity it brought to observe humans behaving as even the philosopher would not have expected them to behave. He derived much of this pleasure from Tacitus, which was why he regarded him as the most philosophical of historians. In his incessant sniping against Voltaire, we can find it intimated that Voltaire's irony is not ironical enough; it enables him to brush aside facts which do not suit him, but decline to vanish at his command. There are fossils on mountain tops and Nestorian inscriptions in China, whether Voltaire likes it or not. A true ironist – Gibbon might have learned this from Hume – would have welcomed these exceptions against his own irony; if Voltaire's irony is sometimes the master of his mind, that is not what irony is for. Gibbon is not always faithful to this prescription, but the association between erudition and irony is deeply seated in his historiographical practice. Details are disobedient to laws, and narrative must recount

[232] Below, p. 277.
[233] Montesquieu: *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. 9, nn. 38, 54; II, ch. 26, n. 136; VI, ch. 58, n. 139; Bayle: II, ch. 25, n. 45; IV, ch. 47, n. 36; V, ch. 50, n. 110; ch. 52, n. 25.

anomalous behaviour.

There are two levels on which Voltaire's indifference to erudition and its critical apparatus may possibly be explained. If we suppose that the *philosophes*, like the exponents of 'polite letters' in England, were anxious to detach themselves from the older learned elites – theologians, jurists, scholastics, grammarians – we can believe that they would be impatient of the latter's often laborious techniques of argument and demonstration, and disposed to dismiss them as pedantry founded on unreal distinctions; while the newer techniques of critical verification, developed in response to the pyrrhonist challenge, might be easily confounded with their predecessors. What requires explanation, we have seen, is not any lack of acumen or insight on Voltaire's part, so much as his refusal to submit to the canons of a shared technique; Robertson's and Gibbon's particular objection was to his failure to give references or write footnotes, and it was from this that they saw all harmful consequences flowing. They were willing, and felt obliged, to conform to scholarly requirements because they were closer to communities with a specialised discourse; Robertson was a divine, Gibbon an admirer of the Académie des Inscriptions. Voltaire was as far from being a pyrrhonist as he was from lacking intensive reading; he would not demonstrate what he knew because he thought it rather easier to know it than it was.

Alternatively, we might suggest that the new subject of *les moeurs* did not fit easily with any of the canons of the received learned disciplines; neither law nor theology nor philology was well adapted to describing them or tracing their history. It was one thing to expound a form of government and show it at tension with others; quite another thing to expound a pattern of behaviour or morality. Giannone's narrative moves from one systematised state of things to another; Voltaire's – and this is in many ways its strength – is concerned with the fluid diversities of culture, not easily reducible to documentation and reference. An objection to this thesis, however, may be put forward by saying that there already existed attempts to systematise the study of *moeurs* and reduce them to science, though Voltaire did not pay much attention to these. Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, to give the obvious example, is a brilliantly independent attempt, by a mind both humanist and jurist, to discover sets of general conditions under which the patterns of human behaviour may take shape, and there is a case for saying that there is more about *moeurs* in it than in the whole of Voltaire's *Essai*; a hostile critic might say that Voltaire does not go beyond the thesis that *moeurs* under barbarism and religion are very different from what they are

under civilisation and philosophy. After Montesquieu were to come the Glasgow and Edinburgh professors, who, with the aid of a Pufendorfian natural jurisprudence were to set about organising the whole field of moral behaviour into systems some of which might be arranged in a historical order; a new science, one of them was to claim, of which Montesquieu was the Bacon and Adam Smith was the Newton.[234] He did not find it necessary to mention Voltaire.

It is easy, and has been general, to reduce this 'science' or 'philosophy' to the establishment of general laws and the pursuit of their particular consequences; a heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers, whose Enlightenment Project was to study the intelligible consistency of human nature until the Counter-Enlightenment came to dissolve all history into the poetics of self-creation. A Momiglianan model of historiography cuts across this paradigm, depicting the construction of histories as a complex and composite activity, into which 'philosophy' in the above sense most importantly entered, but which it could never – so Gibbon had contended in his youthful *Essai* – hope to control. Narrative – the Tacitean relation of the *arcana* of the crooked timber – and erudition – the ironies discoverable in the documented record of society and culture – entered into debate with philosophy and revealed human nature in its knotted grain, the facts about it such that only imagination and judgment could bring them to a settlement. A macronarrative, therefore, even an 'Enlightened narrative' of the passage from antiquity through barbarism and religion to commerce and philosophy, might be enormously enriched by an *essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations*, but needed something more: a narrative of how manners had changed in the specific passage from one system of law and religion to another. Such narratives were best constructed in the contexts furnished by systems of government possessing long histories: those 'histories in national context' so much mistrusted by Europhile historians, without which the history of Europe cannot well be written. We turn next, therefore, to the formation of the Enlightened narrative by historians Gibbon admired without the ambivalence he felt towards Voltaire, inhabiting a context whose history he never wrote but in which he lived while he prepared and wrote much of his history.

[234] Millar, 1818, II, pp. 429–30n.

PART II

The historical age and the historical nation

SECTION III

David Hume and the philosophical history of England

CHAPTER 11

The problems of history in the Hanoverian kingdoms

> . . . this is the historical age and this the historical nation.
>
> David Hume, 1770[1]

> The candour of Dr Robertson embraced his disciple: a letter from Mr Hume over paid the labour of ten years; but I have never presumed to accept a place in the triumvirate of British historians.
>
> Edward Gibbon, 1789–91.[2]

It is desirable to return for a moment to the perspectives of biography. Between his return from Rome in 1765 and his visit to Paris in 1777, Gibbon lived in England uninterruptedly for twelve years, during which he inherited his father's estate, entered London literary and political life, and published the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*. He published the second and third volumes in 1781, and returned to Lausanne in 1783. Though the present work is not a biography, we shall have to consider what light the stages by which Gibbon's history was conceived shed on the ways in which it can be read. In this book we are exploring the universe of the great Enlightened historians, and we aim now to consider the role of historians who wrote in English, the language he had resumed and now came to master as a literary tool, and who lived and thought in that culture that now became his home: the Hanoverian Britain created by the Union of 1707 and the steady demise of the Jacobitism in a flimsy form of which he had been brought up. That culture was about to generate a philosophical historiography of its own, significantly different from that of d'Alembert, Voltaire, Raynal or Diderot. Its recognised masters, hailed by Gibbon in the epigraph to this chapter, were Scots, but their historiography was shaped by Scotland's response to England and therefore to Europe, and Gibbon read them,

[1] Greig, 1932, vol. II, p. 230. [2] *Memoirs*, p. 158.

and wrote himself, as an Englishman. There is a sense in which the Scots wrote as Englishmen; another in which they revolted against this self-description. The British historians had, furthermore, their own ways of encountering and confronting the problems of the relations between philosophy, erudition and narrative. Their world was differently structured from that of the *académiciens* and the *gens de lettres*, and the activity of being an historian was differently conducted. As a cosmopolitan activity, it grew out of two distinctive and rapidly changing national traditions; and though Gibbon never became a national historian, these traditions helped to shape his world and his way of writing about history. The historiographical cultures of both nations, and how they came collectively to deserve Hume's encomium 'this is the historical age and this the historical nation',[3] therefore call for study as we approach the great texts of Gibbon's 'triumvirate', and those of another triumvirate of which he wrote elsewhere.[4]

The Kingdom of Great Britain, in whose parliament Gibbon sat during some critical years in its history and his own, consisted at that time of two strongly distinct but increasingly associated political and literary cultures: England, with its capital at Westminster, its metropolis at London and its still highly ecclesiastical universities at Oxford and Cambridge; and Scotland, with its former capital at Edinburgh, its commercial emporium at Glasgow, and universities at Aberdeen and St Andrews as well as in the two major cities. The duality of the kingdom, together with the special structure of English government, ensured that the patterns of British intellectual culture were unlike those of France. That is, we cannot here employ the model of a strongly authoritative monarchy – let us not waste time by debating the term 'absolute' – which had up to a point succeeded in brigading the conduct of intellectual life, including the writing of history, in a hierarchy of *académies* and other offices under royal patronage and control; in contradistinction to which there is supposed to have existed an alternative intellectual culture, in which *salonnières* and *gens de lettres* invented and then created a 'public space', filling it with the *moeurs* and *opinions* of 'civil society' and 'public opinion', until these constructs came to parallel and then rival the estate of monarchy, from which they were sharply distinct if they were not excluded.[5] This model is not free from problems when we

[3] Though he meant Scotland, he meant Scotland as part of Great Britain; alone, he did not think it would have deserved the title. [4] Below, p. 309.

[5] This model is arrived at by telescoping the arguments of Norbert Elias, Jürgen Habermas and Reinhardt Koselleck, as usefully summarised by Gordon, 1994. See also Baker, 1990. The model is set up here because it is useful to falsify it in the English case, not with the intention of disputing all the ways in which it has been applied by these authors.

apply it to France; we have seen that *académies* and *salons*, *érudition* and *philosophie*, were by no means at war and that traffic passed between them in both directions, while it was the thesis of Voltaire – and in another way of Burke – that French sociability, politeness and enlightenment were the creation of the monarchy and its court, and that matters became critical only when the monarchy ceased to support them. The crucial point here is that the model is not applicable to England, Scotland or Great Britain in the first instance, with the consequence that the writing of history took place in a context differently structured from that supposed to have obtained in France (where indeed the *gens de lettres* and their *république* have the appearance of established facts).

Monarchical government in England may be held to have been 'limited' by law, fiscality and constitutional practice, or with equal truth to have been 'absolute' in the sense that it exercised unlimited legislative sovereignty in a parliament where the crown still played a dominant role. It possessed, however, a far-reaching consultative machinery keeping it in contact with the shires, boroughs, parishes and higher and lower political elites of the English kingdom, and the central enlargement of the crown into the king-in-parliament could be said to constitute an assembly representative at the point where the king consulted with the Lords, representing themselves, and the Commons representing the shires and boroughs. We may further say that this machinery of consultation and representation constituted a symbiosis of state and civil society which renders it unnecessary to think of them as parallel, let alone opposed entities. This in turn does not mean that important changes in the concepts of 'civil society' and 'public opinion' did not take place in the later history of early modern England; only that they took place within its characteristic structure.

There was nothing like the *siècle de Louis XIV* in English history, in the sense that the court, while remaining an important place, did not exert the degree of protection and control over an officialised culture after the Civil Wars or perhaps before them, which the French court busied itself to exert in the days of Richelieu before the Fronde and of Colbert after it. The Royal Society, though an important intervention in Restoration culture, was not part of a hierarchy of *académies*, and though Dryden held the post of historiographer royal in England as Racine did in France, we find no group of 'artisans of glory' whose role it was to write

history as the exhibition of monarchy. The knell of *gloire* in English culture was perhaps rung in 1647 by Thomas May, historian to the parliament where he had formerly hoped to be poet laureate to the king, when he laid it down that the business of the English historian was now the narrative of civil war, in the tones of a Lucan or a Tacitus;[6] it is arguable that this did not cease to be true after May, though he was hurled into the dustbin of historiography by Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*. There is a further sense in which the construction, as distinct from the formal writing, of English history went on from May's time in a 'public space' neither controlled by the monarchy nor shaped in contradistinction to its sphere of control; one shaped by the productive activity of a London press industry never lastingly subjected to censorship and existing in the interplay between court, city and country, whose ephemeral or durable literature was collected by George Thomason in the 1640s and after, and by the agents of Harley and Somers in the 1700s and after. These uncounted pamphlets and periodicals, with the more organised treatises that accompanied them, shaped the perception of a rapidly changing history as it occurred, and then began to be utilised by historians in the latter years of the eighteenth century. They helped to ensure that, as there was no historiography of royal *gloire* in post-Civil War England, so no *histoire philosophique* arose to oppose it; the function of philosophical history in both England and Scotland was altogether different.

The 'public space' and 'public opinion' we may find in English history after 1640 were shaped by the interactions of the state that governed with the society that was governed. These interactions were as profusely articulate as they were, less on account of the limited government, the legal and civil freedoms, and the liberty of the press, in which English people came in time to believe, than on account of the radical weakness of government, and the ferocious divisions of principle, that arose from the reign of Charles I. It is now the fashion among historians to deny that any profound divisions existed as causes of the wars and revolutions of the seventeenth century; those who had to live through that history, however, discovered many such divisions that explained it to them. A largely ungoverned press existed within two or three miles of the centres of an increasingly divided government, whose antagonists exploited the press's capacities but did not repress them; and it developed a capacity to export its representations of events and issues to the

[6] May, 1647, sigs. A3–B2 verso. See Pocock, 'Thomas May and the narrative of civil war', in Hirst and Strier, forthcoming.

country that sent representatives to court. Consequently the substructures of 'opinion' – meaning by that term the always indistinct interactions between the press and its readership – which underlay the construction of history and historiography, came to articulate vividly expressed differences of belief, principle and authority, which were then read into the history both ecclesiastical and civil of England as well medieval as modern, and of Latin Europe in so far as that was needed to explain the history of England. The English were in no doubt that they possessed a collective identity, that this identity was fiercely divided, and that it was these divisions that history was needed to explain. The theme of English historiography was not *gloire* but faction; there was tension between faction and the classical ideal; the historiography shaped itself around the tension; and there came to be tension between the divided identity and the institutions – including the philosophy and historiography – that aimed to put an end to the tensions. Even Hume brought not peace but a sword, though the sword remained undrawn.

The contention here put forward is that the concept of a 'public space', or of an intellectual class, formed externally to a state structure, does not apply well to eighteenth-century England. In Scotland, as we shall see, the scene was different; and it is not being denied here that excluded but articulate groups, who might employ sociability and opinion as resources, were to be found in England. There were Tories (like the Gibbon family) excluded from office by their real or suspected Jacobite tendencies; there were 'old' Dissenters (Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist) excluded by the Test and Corporation Acts; there were 'new' anti-Trinitarian Dissenters excluded from the benefits of the Act of Toleration; and after 1707 there were Scots. These groups, however, were not excluded from the state but from the political nation, a community of discussion in whose debates they desired to take part and whose political language they partly adopted. And up to this point we have been conducting the single-gender analysis of a masculine England. Women, excluded from political agency, might have good reason for developing political opinions as a means of making themselves heard; and the journalists of Anne's reign and after show an increasing and uneasy awareness that they have a female readership interested in political news and political discussion. They debate the means of bringing this new body of potential opinion into the discussion, while forestalling its supposed tendency to succumb to reading works of high-church devotion and epistolary novels, and so fall prey to fanaticism, enthusiasm and sentimentality. It is a noteworthy, but still little-

studied feature of the history of historiography in the eighteenth century that this record of masculine activities, which only males were supposed capable of writing, was increasingly recommended to women readers and marketed for their consumption.[7] It was the rapid growth of a 'reading public', which women did much to create by belonging to it, that helped deliver authors – including historians like Hume, Robertson and Gibbon – from a publishing industry conditioned by patronage and subscription, and allowed them to enter a new kind of 'public space', in which a 'public' and its 'opinion' were located in a space defined by the publishing market. Whether this delivered opinion – including female opinion – from the reign of dispute and the grip of the past is, however, another matter.

Bitter factional disputes, arising from 1641, 1649, 1679 or 1688, entered into the reading of English history, and in particular were read backwards from the last of these crises into those preceding it and centuries earlier still. Non-jurors and high churchmen wrote histories of the fifteenth century in which their legitimism made them Yorkists to a man;[8] convocation men and non-jurors wrote histories of the medieval church which emphasised the clergy's independence of the crown to the verge of popery and the lower clergy's independence of the hierarchy to the verge of presbytery.[9] Apologists for the Revolution of 1688 wrote histories of the crisis of 1641 in which the conduct of the parliamentary leaders was vindicated while the regicide of 1649 was utterly condemned; this is part of what has become known by that over-worked term, the 'Whig interpretation of history'. The need to do so was enhanced by the publication in 1702 of Clarendon's great work, planned by his heirs to constitute a Tory manifesto. Behind these disputes of the last age lay conflicting readings of history since the beginnings of things. Civil history had long since generated the dispute of the ancient constitution:[10] had the laws and assemblies of the Anglo-Saxon kings survived the Conquest of 1066, or had they been swept away by a massive importation of Norman feudal tenures? Ecclesiastical history, as we have already seen, generated disputes reaching back to the origins of the papacy, to the Fathers of the Councils, to Constantine, to the primitive church and by implication to the Incarnation itself; at which point the

[7] I am indebted here to conversations with Mary Catherine Moran (Johns Hopkins University). See further below, pp. 180–3. [8] See, e.g., Harbin, 1713; Douglas, 1943, pp. 164–7.
[9] This may best be studied in the literature of the 'Convocation controversy' between 1697 and 1717. See Douglas, 1943, pp. 260–84; Sykes, 1926 and 1957; Bennett, 1975.
[10] Pocock, 1987a; Burgess, 1992; Cromartie, 1995.

disputes of the Church of England joined with the currents of Protestant and *philosophe* Enlightenment. The English public space, as well ecclesiastical as civil, was crowded, not with opinions but with doctrinaire polemics, to which the concepts of 'opinion' and 'sociability' were intended to serve as Enlightened palliatives.

This does not mean that profound transformations of 'the public space' were not envisaged and perhaps executed towards the outset of the English 'long eighteenth century'; it suggests only that the transformation of a public space should be distinguished from its creation. The most notable of these transformations is that which we have been considering for some time: the notion of a 'commercial society' consequent upon the perceived advent of public credit and a standing army, in which dispute was to be replaced by conversation, inspiration by opinion, doctrine by polite manners, and the warlike worlds of universal monarchy, wars of religion, feudal disorder and the wars of ancient virtue, by a European republic of trading states. Among the cultural programmes associated with this perceived transformation was an offensive against 'pedantic' and 'antiquarian' in the name of 'polite' learning.[11] Like the proposals of Locke, Addison and Shaftesbury to remove philosophy from the schools to the drawing-rooms, this offensive was conducted in the name of an urbane and urban gentry against the older clerical elites, the clergy and the lawyers – together with their fox-hunting dupes among the gentry of the shires – and implied an epistemology in which demonstration and conviction were to be replaced by conversation and opinion, *esse* by *discuti*. Like other aspects of Enlightenment, it aimed to make an end of the culture of disputation; but it was so far from succeeding that among its products was that English version of the *querelle des anciens et modernes* known as the Battle of the Books.[12] In this noisy conflict there can be found more than one paradox. The 'Ancients' came to be those who held that polite moderns knew ancient literature so well that they could imitate but would never attempt to surpass it; whereas the 'Moderns', partisans less of modern *belles-lettres* than of modern philosophy and criticism, held it possible by these means to penetrate an ancient text so deeply that interpretation replaced imitation and it might even be possible to know the text better than its author had. The latter position is that advanced by Gibbon

[11] A good initial account of the impact of 'polite learning' on historical scholarship is in Douglas, 1943, pp. 246–8 and ch. XIII, 'The End of an Age'. There is needed a countervailing account of how scholarship survived these attacks, an English equivalent of Goldgar, 1995.
[12] Levine, 1991.

against d'Alembert, but there is here no *Encyclopédie*, no self-appointed elite of philosophers claiming to set reason (the self-knowledge of the mind) above both *belles-lettres* and criticism. There are no *gens de lettres* in the English scenario; rather, by a final paradox, the Ancients in the Battle of the Books were Tory and near-Jacobite high churchmen seeking to appropriate the Whig ideology of politeness, whereas the Moderns were Whigs seeking, by means often remarkably impolite, critical and philological techniques capable of overturning Tory historical arguments. It was hard to achieve philosophical politeness in a culture as disputatious, pugnacious and obstinately clerical as post-Revolution England. Richard Bentley and William Warburton were not like Bossuet, Rancé or even Mabillon; Whig Church of England men, they were people of paradox and knew it, as from the other end of the spectrum did the very differently inclined Samuel Johnson.

There was a highly usable ancient and medieval past in this culture, debated between opposed civil and ecclesiastical persuasions. So indeed there was in France, debated between exponents of the *thèses royale* and *nobiliaire*; but it is hard to find any cohering group of English *philosophes* aiming to write off everything between the Romans and the moderns as a millennium of unrelieved darkness. When the argument is put forward that English liberties are modern and not ancient,[13] it is a move in the party polemic – typically a defence of the Walpolean regime – and rests on a thesis emerging from the interregnum of the previous century, of central importance in the development of a British philosophical history. Adumbrated by Francis Bacon in 1621, this had been organised by James Harrington in 1656 into the proposition that legislation by Henry VII had destroyed the military power of the nobility and ended the era begun by the introduction of feudal tenures by the Normans. Further developed by the Scot Andrew Fletcher, and contested by the Londoner Daniel Defoe, in 1698, this thesis became that of the general displacement of feudal by commercial relations over all 'Europe' at the end of the fifteenth century, welcomed as bringing peace and enlightenment, challenged as increasing the individual's dependence on public power.[14] The new commercial order had reached fruition at the Peace of Utrecht, and Enlightenment in this perspective owed less to the 'universal monarchy' of Louis XIV than to the successful resistance of a European coalition to it. In England, the power of the landed aristocracy had never been greater than it was in the eighteenth century, but the

[13] The best study of this remains Browning, 1982. See also Kramnick, 1968; Okie, 1991; Burtt, 1992.
[14] Pocock, 1975, chs. 11–14, and 1985, ch. 11, section ii.

imperatives of post-Harringtonian thinking presented this power as modern and commercial – sometimes stigmatising it as corrupt – rather than feudal. Every *ancien* – the word means *ci-devant – régime* in pre-1789 Europe thought of itself as more or less modern and enlightened; that of England was self-defined as post-feudal as well.

The Bacon–Harrington–Fletcher thesis was potent among the paradigms which the English had for organising their history, and it is important that nothing quite like it could be established among the actors in Scottish or French history, because it became one of the building-blocks in the British construction of a 'philosophic history' in the eighteenth century. It identified a 'modern' history that had begun about 1500 and been renewed about 1700, and did so by means of a generalisation that operated in legal, military and social history at the same time, offering a prehistory and antithesis to the portrait of commercial, polite and enlightened modernity; the latter could be either praised or criticised with the means that it provided. The breadth and complexity of this thesis made it important to the growth of the stadial schemes that characterise Scottish philosophical history, which became a panorama of the replacement of one 'state of society' by another; though as we shall see, neither the Greco-Roman nor the Gothic–European historical order corresponds exactly to any of the four stages into which history came to be organised. What is remarkable – considering the richness of general ideas offered by English history and historiography – is that philosophical history in Britain was a Scottish enterprise in which few English writers took part, and that it was a commonplace in the first half of the eighteenth century to lament England's lack of a classically dignified national historiography such as other nations, meaning the French, were supposed to possess. This perceived crisis has been studied by Philip Hicks,[15] who shows it to have been mainly a crisis in neo-classical conventions. It is not easy to determine exactly what French exemplar the English felt they had failed to follow, unless they were merely giving way to the unspecific conviction that they do these things better in France. In that kingdom historiography was perceived as a grand and courtly art, carried on in academies under the protection of royal patronage; but can the English have felt themselves diminished by the lack of a Vertot or a Daniel? The idea of an English academy had been canvassed by both Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift,[16] but the political distance between these authors is enough to show that the

[15] Hicks, 1996.
[16] Defoe, 1697, and Katherine Clark, 1997, pp. 105–12; Swift, 1712, and Levine, 1991, pp. 377–81.

English could not long have desired an authoritative neo-classical history. They cannot have aspired after their own 'artisans of glory', since the English and British monarchy was not expected to organise academies as *ateliers* of panegyric, and equally, they were not in search of *philosophe* historians ostensibly engaged in the subversion of glory. If they had in mind the great Tacitist writers of the previous century, they already possessed in Clarendon their own classic of this kind; but Hicks has shown that an aspect of the perception of crisis was the conviction that Clarendon's accomplishment could never be repeated.

The problem is likely to have been stylistic, and at the same time political. Much had happened to English prose since Jacobean times, and readers with Addisonian politeness before them may have found Clarendon's cadences akin to those of 'ancient' (meaning Renaissance) music. A 'polite' history of England, to be written after 1688 and after 1713–14, must rise above partisanship and above the convictions of the partisans; it must be written in correct neo-classical prose, preferably by one who could play in modernity the neo-classical role of the statesman writing history in retirement, or the rhetorician adapting himself to the culture of politeness. If there was a crisis in English 'Augustan' historiography,[17] it was the discovery that though these roles were called for by the assumptions of the age, including the assumption of French cultural superiority, they were in fact not available in a still factious and clerical England.

Bolingbroke's failure in this regard is an important episode in Hicks's narrative.[18] He aspired to the role of a second Clarendon, associated himself with the Hyde family in some Jacobite activities, and clearly hoped to write a great history of Europe to the Treaty of Utrecht, with himself in the character of statesman unjustly dismissed from office on the morrow of triumph, and left to assume the role of historian. But this came to nothing, and his *Letters on the Study of History* aim no higher than to furnish such knowledge of the history of the European states system as is needed by a politician in the post-Utrecht world. Bolingbroke's project might have been a European but probably not an English history, and his *Dissertation on Parties* and *Remarks on the History of England* are polemical interpretations of an ancient constitution corrupted by a Whig design of keeping party alive when it has become unmeaning and a Walpolean design of exalting executive power by improperly influencing members of the legislature.[19] They have their place in the history of

[17] Okie, 1991. [18] Hicks, 1987 and 1996, pp. 136–42. [19] Kramnick, 1968 and 1978.

the debate over English politics, but underline the point that it was Bolingbroke's adventurism and self-imposed marginalisation which inhibited – where exile ought in theory to have encouraged – his adoption of the grand objectivity of a historian. His great history was simply never written. The field came to be held instead by the solid, whiggish work of the Huguenot Paul de Rapin-Thoyras, which, apart from its failure to rise – and how did one rise? – above faction and partisanship, could never, as the work of a foreigner read in English translation, qualify as that national glory in neo-classical letters for which the English reading public was calling.[20]

It was, then, the problem of partisanship, the difficulty of seeing both sides of the question or obtaining credit for it if one did – as Thomas May was perhaps the first to perceive – which rendered difficult the writing of classical narrative history in England. Clarendon had achieved grandeur, while never abandoning his royalism, in his study of the Civil Wars; but since his time there had been the savagery of Restoration politics, the still deeply disputed revolution of 1688, the rage of party through the reign of Anne, and the scarcely less disputed accession of the Hanoverians, and all this remained unfinished business confronting the formation of a neo-classical politics and its narrative. Gibbon could have been aware of his own family's indeterminate position in this context when he wrote in 1762:

> I should shrink with terror from the modern history of England, where every character is a problem and every reader a friend or an enemy: where a writer is supposed to hoist a flag of party, and is devoted to damnation by the adverse faction.[21]

He therefore chose to avoid it; but by the time he wrote this, the problem of grand historiography in England was supposed to have been solved, though that of partisanship clearly had not. In 1767, after his return to Hampshire, Gibbon joined his Lausannais friend Georges Deyverdun in editing a short-lived but interesting periodical, the *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*, and in the first of its two issues, as part of a review of George Lord Lyttelton's *History of the Life of King Henry II*, are to be found these words:

> Les autres nations de l'Europe avoient devancé les Anglois dans la carriere de l'Histoire. L'Angleterre possedait des Poetes et des Philosophes, mais on lui reprochait de n'avoir que de froids Annalistes, ou des Declamateurs passionnés.

[20] For Rapin, see Girard d'Albissin, 1969; Forbes, 1975; Minuti, 1984; Stephan, 1986; Phillipson, 1989; Okie, 1991. [21] *Journal A*, p. 103; *Memoirs*, pp. 121–2.

Deux grands hommes ont fait taire ce reproche.[22] Un Robertson a paré les annales de sa patrie de toutes les graces de l'eloquence la plus male.[23] Un Hume, né pour eclairer et pour juger les hommes, a porté dans l'histoire la lumière d'une philosophie profonde et elegante. Nous ne prodiguerons jamais à la grandeur la recompense des talens: Mylord L. ne doit point pretendre à la gloire de ces hommes de genie,[24] mais il lui reste la qualité d'un bon citoyen, d'un savant très eclairé, d'un ecrivain exact et impartial, et c'est avec plaisir, que nous les lui accordons.[25]

[The other nations of Europe had formerly outdistanced the English in the contest of History. England had poets and philosophers, but was reproached with the possession only of dry annalists and impassioned declaimers. Two great men have silenced this accusation. A Robertson has adorned the annals of his country with all the graces of the most masculine eloquence. A Hume, born to enlighten and to judge mankind, has brought to history the illumination of a profound and elegant philosophy. We shall never squander by exaggeration the just reward of talent. My lord L. cannot pretend to the renown of these men of genius, but he retains the character of a good citizen, an enlightened scholar, and an exact and impartial author; and it is with pleasure that we recognise these qualities in him.][26]

Gibbon, who is the author of this passage,[27] rehearses the conventional complaint, but declares that it has now been put to silence by the appearance of David Hume's *History of Great Britain/History of England*, published in six volumes between 1754 and 1762, and William Robertson's *History of Scotland*, published in two volumes in 1759. By looking closely at the above passage, it is possible to detect that Robertson was writing Scottish history, but it is the honour of English historiography that has been vindicated, and there is no other indication that both Hume and Robertson were Scots. The usual comments on the blinkered ethnocentricity of the English would no doubt be in order; even if Gibbon is thinking of them as North Britons, he is assuming that the history of Britain is the history of England. There is, however, a little more to it than that. There was a crisis in Scottish historiography, by no means of the same kind as that which appears to have existed in English; yet it was partly in the attempt to solve the Scottish problem that Hume

[22] Cf. *Memoirs*, p. 98: 'The old reproach that no British altars had been raised to the muse of history, was recently disproved by the first performances of Robertson and Hume, the Histories of Scotland and of the Stuarts.'

[23] See *Memoirs*, p. 99, on Robertson's style, and *EEG*, pp. 119–20.

[24] *Memoirs*, p. 143: 'that voluminous work, in which sense and learning are not illuminated by a ray of Genius'. [25] *Mém. litt.*, p. 28; Lyttelton, 1767. [26] Trans. JGAP.

[27] It is not possible to identify the author of every notice in the *Mémoires littéraires* (*YEG*, pp. 257–60) and they must be used cautiously, for the light they throw on Gibbon's intellectual environment. However, on p. 143 of *Memoirs of My Life* Gibbon acknowledges writing the review of Lyttelton.

put himself forward, rather self-consciously, as offering a solution to the English. As Gibbon describes the problem which Hume and Robertson have solved, it is that of providing a grand narrative, written in polite prose and satisfying the newly emerging canons of philosophical explanation. He does not think that Lyttelton, with his lack of whatever is meant by 'genius', has met this demand; and he will not have been satisfied by the observation, in another work of 1766 of which the *Mémoires littéraires* take notice hostile on other grounds, that the lacuna in English historiography has been made good by two English rather than Scottish authors, of whom Lyttleton is one and the other, 'belonging to the more delicate part of the creation', is Catharine Macaulay.[28] Gender disregarded – as in her case it sometimes was – Macaulay's *History of England* was defiantly partisan, republican and part of the London subversive operation in which her family the Sawbridges had long been active. Hume, though he addressed Macaulay with respect,[29] wrote of her party as 'those insolent rascals in London and Middlesex',[30] and neither he nor Gibbon would see the radical challenge of the Present Discontents – as Burke was to call them – as likely to produce histories that were neo-classical, polite and philosophical, designed to bring about an end to faction, disputation and partisan writing. Hume was to produce a *History of England* that had these ends in view, but while its intellectual greatness was widely recognised, it was generally received as a partisan document. This alone was enough to convince him that faction in England was probably ineradicable, and when in the last months of his life he received the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*, he wondered that such a work could have been written by an inhabitant of so barbarously impolite a kingdom.[31] The furious clerical responses to Gibbon's fifteenth and sixteenth chapters would not have surprised Hume, had he known of them, as they may have surprised Gibbon; but the reception of both masterpieces was such as to inform their authors that the writing of Enlightened history in at least the southern Hanoverian kingdom could stir up the anger it offered to allay. Social peace was dearly bought when the price was the historisation of Christianity. There remained the more immediate question whether the philosophical history the Scots offered could be other than a history of England, and whether this was not a price which had to be paid in order to make it philosophical.

The crisis in Scottish historiography, as it was discerned from within

[28] Parsons, 1766, pp. xxi–xxii. [29] Klibansky and Mossner, 1954, no. 40.

[30] Greig, 1932, II, p. 303. [31] Greig, 1932, vol. II, p. 309; *Memoirs*, pp. 168–70.

Scotland, may be deferred until we examine the world of William Robertson. Hume was a Scot, and the differences between Scotland and England, and between their histories, were important to him; but he came to historiography from philosophy, and there is a dramatic tension about his decision to make his mind known through the former rather than the latter, which emphasises the unusual relation between the two. As we have remarked already, Hume is the only major philosopher to have produced a major work of historiography, and to have expounded his philosophy through the medium of historiography without the aid of a historicist philosophy of the kind appearing in the next century; and this must raise questions concerning the role played by philosophy in establishing his historical narrative. His early life, as we have it from his autobiography and his biographers,[32] is that of a solitary, a young student immersed in the problems of moral epistemology and metaphysics, as the early eighteenth century presented them, with an intensity that endangered his health; whereas the leaders of the 'Scottish Enlightenment' he was later to join were all active social beings immersed in the institutional life of Edinburgh and Glasgow. From his initial experiences – which included the writing of the *Treatise of Human Nature* – Hume emerged with three convictions: first, that he was a failure as a philosopher, at least as far as concerned the winning of an audience for his philosophy; second, that the moral life was the product of society, to be understood only through a grasp of the mind in its social behaviour; third, that the religious and the sacred consisted wholly of myth, inventions and imaginations of that same mind in society. These convictions dictated a transformation of both philosophy and theology into a natural history of the mind; but by a further series of steps hard for us to recapture, Hume was led to commit himself to a civil history, not that of Scotland but of England. In what senses this came to be a philosophical history is next for us to consider.

[32] Hume, 'My Own Life', in Miller, 1985, pp. xxxii–xxxiii; Phillipson, 1989, pp. 7–11.

CHAPTER 12

David Hume: the Essays *as contemporary history*

Gibbon's remark in the *Mémoires littéraires* that Hume has 'porté dans l'histoire la lumière d'une philosophie profonde et élégante'[33] is bound to turn our thoughts towards the *Treatise of Human Nature* and the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and to make us enquire whether their radically insightful epistemology did anything to turn Hume towards history as a mode of understanding, and so make him at once a major and innovative philosopher and a major and innovative historian – a combination then as now 'as rare among us as a hippogriff',[34] as was said of Hume for very different reasons. It may well have been so; yet we must bear in mind that the words '*philosophie*' and 'philosophy' very often denoted a fixed determination to have nothing to do with epistemology, metaphysics or what could otherwise be termed 'minute philosophy', and that both Hume and Gibbon may have been led to history by a cultivated temper of the mind rather than a close scrutiny of its workings. Gibbon came to own copies of Hume's *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (including the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*), his *History of England* and his posthumously published *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*[35] – the last item may be significant – but not of the *Treatise*; the many citations of Hume in the *Decline and Fall* are all of the *Essays* and the *History*,[36] and the one reference to 'the fine philosophy of Hume' has to do with the soundness of Hume's historical judgment in holding that even popes sometimes behave conventionally rather than with unsleeping cunning.[37] In enquiring after the ways in which Hume's 'philosophy' made him the historian he became, and accounted for the veneration in which he was held by Gibbon, it is necessary to proceed with caution.

David Hume was born in 1711, the younger son of a family of minor

[33] Above, p. 174.
[34] William Warburton, quoted in foreword to Todd, *History*, I, p. xiv. Warburton said that Hume was 'an atheistical Jacobite, a monster as rare', etc. Both halves of the epithet are incorrect, but not unduly so. [35] *Library*, p. 156. [36] Womersley, III, p. 1227.
[37] *Decline and Fall*, ch. 59 (Womersley, III, p. 646; Bury, VI, p. 371).

lairds, and therefore faced through much of his life the problem of finding a profession as well as a secure income; Gibbon as a sole heir was troubled only by the latter. In his youth he appears to have been given to intense and introspective solitary thought on the nature of knowledge, so obsessive as to endanger his health and stability; he says little of this in his recollections, and to contemporaries it might have sounded monkish and enthusiastic. At the age of twenty-three, he went to live in France, in frugal retirement at La Flèche in Anjou (which was, coincidentally or otherwise, the seat of a Jesuit academy) and there composed the *Treatise of Human Nature*, for which he is chiefly remembered in the late twentieth century. In 1738 he returned to live in London, where the published *Treatise* (1739–40) seemed to him a complete failure as far as readership was concerned. A decade and more later, he made two attempts to recast his 'philosophy', as we should call it, in a more readable form, but these did not strike him as successful in attracting an audience, or a 'public'.[38] He had already, in 1741–2, begun publishing his *Essays Moral and Political*, and this part of his life may be viewed as a pilgrimage from solitary analytical philosophy toward sociable *belles-lettres* and conversation; the question is how far he regarded the latter as a means of communicating the message which had fallen dead when conveyed by the former, how far we need to turn back to the *Treatise* in search of the semantics of the *Essays* and the *History*. A comment on this question was made, sixty years later, by a biographer of John Millar, student and then colleague of Adam Smith at Glasgow University.

> In saying that Mr Millar adopted Mr Hume's metaphysical opinions, I chiefly allude to those contained in his Essays. It is not a little surprising, that, even after this author had expressly stated his desire that these writings alone should be considered as containing his philosophical opinions, his opponents should still continue to refer to the Treatise of Human Nature; a work of equal or perhaps still greater ingenuity, but wanting the elegance, and accuracy of expression, which distinguish Mr Hume's later publications.[39]

It is a far cry from modern scholarship. The situation has been reversed since the eighteenth century; metaphysics and epistemology have become powerful and jealous professionalised disciplines, and it is possible to find the study of Hume appropriated by philosophers self-

[38] Hume, 'My Own Life', in Miller, pp. xxxiii–xxxv; Phillipson, 1989, pp. 7–9. See p. 8, for Hume's account of the existential *angst* from which he suffered. He says it was the furore over Middleton's *Free Enquiry* in 1748 which robbed his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* of attention (Miller, p. xxxv).

[39] Millar, 1806 (John Craig, preface, 'Account of the Life and Writings of John Millar, Esq.', p. lxi, note).

defined as indifferent to his polite writings, his *belles-lettres* and his historiography.

The two volumes of essays which appeared in 1741–2 were enlarged by a third volume in 1747 and a volume of *Political Discourses* in 1752. These together form the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, which were a component of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, together with the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, the *Natural History of Religion* and other works, a collection several times re-issued which Hume was still revising at the time of his death. Gibbon owned the editions of 1760, 1768 and 1777, and thus knew Hume's 'philosophical' writings as their author intended them to be read. The *History of England* was complete, but for subsequent revisions, by 1762, but Gibbon owned no edition earlier than 1770; he was clearly reading it at an earlier date. The *Essays*, then, are to be read as the chief format in which Hume intended his 'philosophy', in most senses of the term, to be conveyed to his contemporaries; they can also be read as preparing the way for the *History of England*.

Though the *Essays* of 1741–2 and the *Political Discourses* of 1752 were written and initially published in Scotland, the political scene they presuppose is British and its history – that is, the history needed to make it intelligible – is English; Hume is adopting a perspective which may be termed both North British and Anglo-British.[40] His reader is invited to situate himself – and in a real though a different way herself – in the political nation formed by the Union of 1707 and currently governed by the powerful, though by 1741 disintegrating, regime of Sir Robert Walpole. It is to the moral, political and literary problems of life under that regime, and after it, that the reader's attention is drawn. They are the problems of a polite society, a polite society is conceived as modern (and indeed recent),[41] and modernity is a historical problem which a history must be written to explain. This history is in the first instance British, in the sense that it is created by events and developments in Britain since 1688 and 1714, but Anglo-British in the sense that these happenings and their historical preconditions are situated in a history, of social and religious change and civil war, occurring predominantly in England; Hume does not feel much need to invoke Scottish history to explain the present that preoccupies him and his readers. In the second instance, this history is European in a strongly western sense. To

[40] The latter term is usefully proposed by Kidd, 1993.

[41] 'The first polite prose we have, was writ by a man who is still alive. [n. Dr Swift]'. Hume, 'Of Civil Liberty' (1741); Miller, p. 91.

understand modern Britain it is necessary to understand the Anglo-French relationship, and this in turn must be situated in a post-Utrecht Europe, intelligible by contrast with its baroque, medieval and ancient predecessors. Hume does not strongly echo Voltaire's vehement insistence on the contrast between modern Europe and the Christian millennium; the Protestant and parliamentary culture in which he lived was secure enough in its neo-classicism to employ the image of the Roman republic and its civic virtue in an incessant critique of its own modernity. Much of the historiography explicit and implicit in the collected *Essays* is therefore a criticism of ancient politics, Athenian, Spartan and Roman, and a demonstration of ways in which a modern politics may accept its own shortcomings as the price of its superiority over the ancient. There are points at which this criticism becomes a historical explanation of how the greatness led to the decline of the Roman republic, the Augustan principate, and the empire exercised by both. This had been the subject of Montesquieu's *Considérations sur la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, and was to be that of Gibbon's first volume. It is worth pointing out that the composition of the *Essays* began at a date (*c.* 1739) early enough to make Hume an independent contemporary of both Montesquieu and Voltaire, whatever the relationships that may be discovered between their works.

Since historiography is one of several components making up the *belles-lettres* of the *Essays*, it is not the object of much independent reflection. There is an essay 'Of the Study of History', published in 1741 but withdrawn from the canon after 1760,[42] which situates historiography in a context of gender-relations by recommending it in the opening sentence

> to my female readers . . . as an occupation, of all others, the best suited to their sex and education, much more instructive than their ordinary books of amusement, and more entertaining than those serious compositions, which are usually to be found in their closets.[43]

Later:

> I shall now proceed to handle my subject more seriously, and shall point out the many advantages which flow from the study of history, and show how well suited it is to every one, but particularly to those who are debarred the severer studies, by the tenderness of their complexion, and the weakness of their education. The advantages to be found in history seem to be of three kinds, as it amuses the fancy, as it improves the understanding, and as it strengthens virtue.[44]

[42] Miller, pp. 563–8. [43] Miller, p. 563. [44] Miller, p. 565.

It seems possible to ask how far Hume was moved to write not only this, but the *Essays* in general, by the thought that the modern polity he wished to advocate was founded on opinion, that opinion was formed in conversation, and that the participation of women in both reading and conversation – the convergence of the household space with the public space – had reached a level where attention must be paid to their inclusion in the formation of the polity. Whether an improvement of 'the weakness of their education' would render women more capable of 'the severer studies' – philosophy and divinity, erudition and law – is left ambiguous; and one reason for this – 'the tenderness of their complexion' of course asserts another – is that some diminution of the hegemony of the 'severer studies' is being recommended to males as well as females. The turn towards polite conversation was intended to unseat the clerics and the lawyers, and the 'raillery' which Hume fears he may be adopting towards 'the ladies'[45] had been recommended by Shaftesbury as an antidote to partisanship and fanaticism in masculine conversation.[46] The histories which women are recommended to read are much the same as those which men read, and they are to read them for much the same reasons. What is lacking, unsurprisingly, is any suggestion that they are to write as well as read them, or acquire the erudition and 'severer studies' necessary to do so; women are to be the auditors, perhaps the discussants, of their social being, but in no sense its authors. Because history 'improves the understanding and strengthens virtue', it is 'more instructive than their ordinary books of amusement', the novels and romances which may lead to an excess of sentiment and seducibility;[47] because it 'amuses the fancy', it is 'more entertaining than those serious compositions which are usually to be found in their closets'. In all probability, these are meant to be works of devotion written by churchmen – it might outrun the evidence to contend that Hume had Mary Astell in view – which may perpetuate the power of ecclesiastics over the suggestible female intelligence. Gibbon reading this sentence would find his aunt Hester and William Law starting to his mind, and there was perceptible anxiety over women's propensity to high-church and other forms of enthusiasm. And we should not be led by such phrases as 'amuses the fancy' and 'entertaining' into supposing that women are to be distracted by cultural opiates. The mind's willingness to be entertained, we have to keep clear before us, was morally and philosophically superior to its willingness to undergo conviction and conversion to any

[45] Miller, p. 565. [46] Klein, 1994, pp. 96, 98, 159, 168.
[47] See the anecdote about the 'young beauty' on Miller, p. 564.

of the various forms of fanaticism. Men as well as women ought to read history because it amused the fancy, improved the understanding and strengthened virtue; it was part of philosophy to do so. The deflections of gender become apparent when we ask whether women are to understand what they read well enough to criticise and even rewrite it; if not, needless to say, they will be pupils to men and teachers only to their children. Hume's own intellectual life did not contain an Emilie du Chatelet for whom he could write 'pour s'instruire avec elle'.

The history by which both men and women are to be entertained, instructed and edified is, we immediately learn, philosophical history. Hume proceeds from the sentence last quoted:

> In reality, what more agreeable entertainment to the mind, than to be transported into the remotest ages of the world, and to observe human society, in its infancy, making the first faint essays towards the arts and sciences: To see the policy of government, and the civility of conversation refining by degrees, and every thing which is ornamental to human life advancing towards its perfection. To remark the rise, progress, declension, and final extinction of the most flourishing empires: The virtues, which contributed to their greatness, and the vices, which drew on their ruin.[48] In short, to see all [the] human race, from the beginning of time, pass, as it were, in review before us; appearing in their true colours, without any of those disguises, which, during their life-time, so much perplexed the judgment of the beholders. What spectacle can be imagined, so magnificent, so various, so interesting? What amusement, either of the senses or imagination, can be compared with it?[49]

Narrative which entertains, and philosophy which instructs, are once more combined to render history the *magistra vitae*; and erudition, third in d'Alembert's triad, appears in a somewhat ambiguous light. A great deal of it

> is nothing but an acquaintance with historical facts. An extensive knowledge of this kind belongs to men of letters;[50] but I must think it an unpardonable ignorance in persons of whatever sex or condition, not to be acquainted with the history of their own country, together with the histories of ancient GREECE and ROME. A woman may behave herself with good manners, and have even some vivacity in her turn of wit; but where her mind is so unfurnished, 'tis impossible her conversation can afford any entertainment to men of sense and reflection.[51]

The nearer erudition comes to being mere information, the easier it is

[48] This recalls Montesquieu on the *grandeur et décadence des Romains*, but it is scarcely implicit that virtues become vices under changed historical conditions.

[49] Miller, pp. 565–6. Observe how the historical perception weeds out the confusions of the contemporary. [50] Is Hume thinking in French? [51] Miller, p. 566; cf. pp. 535–7.

for a woman, not erudite herself, to understand what the erudite is talking about. There is, of course, the suggestion that erudition and philosophy are for men, and that her conversation is limited to entertaining them rather than instructing herself; but Hume may possibly be saying that if she is so uninformed that she cannot entertain, she will never go on to understand.[52] And he describes a history that entertains, instructs, amuses, by imparting, as well as requiring, a capacity for philosophic generalisations about the progress of society and the decline of empires. Women are not shut out from philosophical capacity in this sense, because history in the form of *belles-lettres* imparts it; and there is no suggestion that the 'men of letters' are exercising a faculty to which erudition and *belles-lettres* are equally subject.

A predominant theme – this does not exclude or marginalise the presence of others – in the essays of 1741–2 and 1752 is, then, to situate the mid-Hanoverian regime and its reading public in the history, and the ways of thinking about history, needed for the understanding of the regime and the self-understanding of the public. This is a large part of the 'philosophy' of the *Essays*; but we are obliged – and perhaps Hume was – to enquire how far the epistemology, or metaphysics, of the *Treatise of Human Nature* is needed in this process of historical understanding. The *Essays* do not contain much in the way of systematic attempts to connect the two, though it is to be remembered that between 1742 and 1752 Hume wrote two *Enquiries* and other works intended – he thought unsuccessfully – to make the thinking of the *Treatise* more accessible to a reading public.[53] The most complex attempt to apply epistemology to historical knowledge occurs in 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences',[54] published in 1742, and is not to be found – perhaps out of tenderness towards the female intellect – in 'Of the Study of History' a year earlier. Here Hume is examining the intelligibility of causes in the study of historical phenomena, and applying his general rule that the connection between an effect and its cause is easier to infer than to perceive. It follows, he says, that the connection can be more securely established where some general change in human conditions produces

[52] A tale used to be told of the late Charles de Gaulle, who as President of France was seated at dinner next to the young queen of a European country. She confided in him that she loved to read history. De Gaulle bent his brow upon her, and enquired 'And does it make you happy?' She replied, 'Oh yes, very happy!', after which there was nearly a diplomatic incident, since the President could not be got to address another remark to his neighbour for the remainder of the evening. By 'happy' she doubtless meant that she found history 'amusing' and 'entertaining' in the eighteenth-century sense; de Gaulle was demanding insight into the *arcana imperii*.

[53] 'My Own Life'; Miller, pp. xxv–xxvi. [54] Miller, pp. 111–37.

changes in the actions and thoughts of large numbers of people – as in the case of the rise and progress of the arts and sciences – than in the actions of a finite number of particular persons. In the former case, statistical generalisation can lead to a high degree of probability in the perception of cause-effect relationships; there was a general shift in the historical conditions, and a general change in human behaviour of the kind we would expect to be its effect. In the latter case, the behaviour of individuals must be connected with their peculiar circumstances; it is harder to reason back to the general change which may have been going on; and the chances that individual behaviour will not conform to the general pattern of change, but will stand in some anomalous and ironic relation to it, are very much greater.[55] It follows that there are always two histories to be written: that of cultural change, and that of particular actions; and the relations between them are necessarily anomalous. It is in this sense – to quote the title of a 1741 essay – 'That Politics may be Reduced to a Science'.[56]

Hume had made an important move in the adjustment of relations between narrative, philosophy and more remotely erudition, in the reshaping of historiography. There could continue to be a neo-classical and Tacitean narrative of high politics, statecraft and war, in which the actions of men and their outcomes would remain arcane, in the sense that they would not be obedient to general causes, but to the mysteries of the human psyche and the human condition; the great masters of this kind of history, from Thucydides to Clarendon, remained exemplary and imitable, even in their warnings against the error of believing imitation a simple skill. Bolingbroke and Swift, the defeated Tories of 1714, could imagine themselves historians in this sense; their failure to write the great history they imagined need have had no general cause. But alongside this historiography, and now and then intersecting with it, there could go on a history written in the new philosophical sense: the search for general causes and their effects, the search for those fields of human experience of which the history in this sense could most tellingly be written. Hume remarked at this point that the history of commerce was probably easier to write than the history of learning and the arts,[57] because less dependent on the arcane creative initiatives of individual genius – though even these had their dependence on general facilitating conditions.

The two histories would have to proceed side by side, and in a politically active society such as Britain there was little incentive to use

[55] Miller, pp. 112–13. [56] Miller, pp. 14–31. [57] Miller, p. 113.

general history to drive out particular, cultural history to drive out the history of kings and their opponents, in the manner of the *Encyclopédistes*. The inner politics of the history Hume was proposing may have been a politics of gender. It was the philosophical history, of the progress of arts, sciences and society, which was recommended to women readers; and we may choose to infer that the harsher and more arcane history of war, statecraft and intrigue (which would never make them happy) was reserved for the masculine mind. Even if this is Hume's meaning (as it probably is), we must observe that the science of society, the progress of the arts and sciences and the philosophical history that narrated it, was being developed at great speed in intellectual discourse among men, and was within limits being proposed as a discourse open to both genders. There remains, of course, no suggestion that women are to write history as well as read it. If the Tacitean probing of the *arcana imperii* is one of the 'severer studies' from which they are debarred by their complexion and education, so too, very likely, is the mathematics of probability, like that of the Marquis de Dangeau, which underlies the differentiation of general causes from particular narratives. It is worth recalling, however, that Emilie du Chatelet was a mathematician, whereas Gibbon assures us that he abandoned the practice of mathematics as soon as he had mastered its principles.[58] Was this feminine thinking on his part? He could have had Hume's essay before him when he wrote that passage of the *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature* which appeals to Dangeau and confronts general causes with particular ironies.[59]

There remained the literary as well as scientific problem of reconciling narrative, philosophy and erudition. The first concerned the deeds of individuals; the second generated reflections and digressions, and the third footnotes. The first retained such authority that, as late as 1762, no less philosophical a writer than Adam Smith could still insist so sternly on the unities of time and place in historical narrative as to proclaim that extraneous criticism and reflection had no place in the narrative and, though necessary in modern history because of its controversial nature, diminished its value in comparison with the ancient.[60] For Hume there were two kinds of history, and Smith's dictum had already been overtaken by the work of his friends during the later 1750s, when Hume produced the first history of England and Robertson the first history of Scotland which successfully combined the narrative of deeds with that of the progress of society. It remained a problem, however, where

[58] *Memoirs*, p. 78. [59] *EEG*, pp. 232.
[60] *LRBL*, pp. 102–3. Below, pp. 324–5. See Wootton, 1995, pp. 77–105, esp. p. 81.

philosophical reflection, and its attendant erudition, should stand in the structure of a history. In the text itself? In appended digressions or separate chapters? In endnotes or footnotes? Hume, Robertson and in due course Gibbon had each to solve this problem in his own way. What made them acknowledged giants of the new historiography was that they had proposed the problem, and offered solutions to it.

The *Essays* lack narrative form, for the reason that they are not the *History of England*; but they are deeply concerned with establishing the historical, as well as philosophical, context in which the Walpolean regime is to be understood. This is a context of modernity, and modernity is acknowledged to be controversial and ambivalent. A 'Character of Sir Robert Walpole' – withdrawn after 1768[61] – arrives at the conclusion:

> During his time trade has flourished, liberty declined, and learning gone to ruin. As I am a man, I love him; as I am a scholar, I hate him; as I am a BRITON, I calmly wish his fall. [62]

To say that liberty has declined is to say that Walpole has employed the patronage of the crown to undermine the independence of the Commons and the liberty of the people as represented by their members. There are other essays, however, which pronounce that under Hanoverian conditions the power and independence of the Commons is so great as to make British government very nearly that of a republic;[63] that a high incidence of patronage is necessary to establish a crown interest in parliament, and make government by the monarchy still possible;[64] that, however great the controlling influence of a minister such as Walpole, we can conclude neither that the constitution is wholly corrupted by his rule – the contention of Walpole's enemies such as Bolingbroke – nor that the constitution is so perfect that the corruption he has introduced does not matter.[65] Hume does not share the belief that the balance of the constitution renders it perfect; rather, he sees it as a balance between necessary imperfections, on the whole to be relied upon but never to be worshipped. It follows that human government is an imperfect affair –

> In all governments, there is a perpetual intestine struggle, open or secret, between AUTHORITY and LIBERTY; and neither of them can ever absolutely prevail in the contest[66] –

[61] Miller, pp. 574–6. [62] Miller, p. 576. [63] Miller, p. 44 ('Of the Independency of Parliament').
[64] Miller, p. 45. [65] Miller, pp. 27–31 ('That Politics may be Reduced to a Science').
[66] Miller, p. 40 ('Of the Origin of Government').

and that there is no equilibrium which can be expected to last for all time. The enquiry 'Whether the British government inclines more to absolute monarchy, or to a republic'[67] proceeds from the assumption that it contains elements of both, to the conclusion that it is in the foreseeable future more likely to end in the former than in the latter – because of the increasing influence of the Crown – but that this 'easiest death, the true *Euthanasia* of the BRITISH constitution'[68] is less dreadful than the civil wars and military tyrannies which would result from the opposite outcome. History remains classical, a narrative of beginnings and endings, rise and decline; but the endings are not catastrophic or apocalyptical, since they can never be altogether final. In his later years, we shall find, Hume returned to this vision of a constitutional euthanasia, and was perhaps not so sure that it would be as easy a death as his own.[69] He had already isolated the unchecked growth of public debt as the likeliest cause of constitutional collapse, and was inclined to see it as a threat to society as well as to government.

To say that under Walpole's ministry trade had flourished but 'learning gone to ruin', and 'as I am a scholar, I hate him', was to invoke another set of ambiguities. On the one hand, it was an opposition and patriot commonplace that Walpole was the enemy of the arts ('Bob the poets' foe'), and to identify him with Sejanus and thus with the Roman principate under which, Tacitus had written, the arts – meaning rhetoric and historiography – could no longer flourish. But the poets who complained that Walpole was stifling them were not uncommonly Tories and crypto-Jacobites, and Hume had little sympathy for either their monarchism or the republicanism they contrived to mix with it; and it was always possible to challenge Tacitus by pointing out (with Voltaire) that Virgil, Horace and Livy had flourished under Augustus.[70] Why then was Walpole not a Maecenas or a Medici, employing the arts to substitute monarchy for liberty? The answer might lie in the outspoken confrontation between authority and liberty which characterised British politics and made it certain that there would never be a *siècle de Georges II*; or in the rapid creation of a system of government stocks and public credit, which transformed the nature of patronage and made it crudely an instrument of corruption instead of a benign and polite exchange of *beneficia* for *officia*. But to ask such questions was to raise the problem of why a flourishing trade was accompanied by the ruin of learning. The activities and ethics of merchants might themselves be

[67] Miller, pp. 47–53. [68] Miller, p. 53. [69] Pocock, 1985, pp. 125–41.
[70] Above, pp. 85–6.

neither civil nor polite; but by increasing the circulation of goods and money they made possible the increase of independence, leisure, consumption and sociability on which the arts depended. If this was a general law, the condition of British culture under the regime of Walpole required further explanation.

In several essays of 1741–2, in particular 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences',[71] Hume examined this question on a large historical scale; it was in this essay, as we have seen, that the problems of historical causation and historiography received fullest treatment. The arts and sciences had originated and developed among the Greek and Roman ancients, who understood both liberty and law; but when we came to look more closely at ancient liberty, we saw it to have been violent and disorderly. Consequently – though it had been a key moment in Hume's progress towards unbelief when he preferred to take his social morality from Cicero's *De officiis* than from Richard Allestree's Christian *The Whole Duty of Man* – there was an admixture of barbarism in ancient manners which had inhibited their arts from becoming truly polite.[72] Hume adopted the standpoint of a Modern in suggesting that the neo-classical might outdo the classical; but he did not abandon the contention of Tacitus that the arts of speech had flourished under the republic and declined under the principate. The solution must be that the arts were of more than one kind and flourished in different ways under different forms of government;

> and that a republic is more favourable to the growth of the sciences, a civilised monarchy to that of the polite arts.[73]

This dictum was a source of Hume's general contention that republic and absolute monarchy were less antithetical than complementary, so that the history of Europe and the theory of politics were alike in entailing the study of both. The latter was not an oriental despotism or a tyranny, but a government according to law under which property and exchange, manners and the arts, could be protected and flourish; under modern conditions, indeed, authority and liberty, and with them the two forms of government, were likely to draw close to one another and become indistinguishable.[74] The crucial difference had to do with manners rather than laws. The republic was a society of equals – it seems almost certain that Hume meant masculine equals – in which minds encountered each other directly, in emulation and contention, and

[71] Miller, pp. 111–37. [72] Miller, pp. 127–9. [73] Miller, p. 124.
[74] Miller, pp. 94–5 ('Of Civil Liberty').

curiosity, criticism and conflict could give rise to 'the growth of the sciences'. Erudition would be one of the latter; the 'learning' which had 'gone to ruin' under Walpole is among the 'severer studies' which flourish in the masculine republic, whereas the polite letters which are among the objects of its critical examination are the product of a different political order.

> But in a civilised monarchy, there is a long train of dependence from the prince to the peasant, which is not great enough to render property precarious, or depress the minds of the people; but is sufficient to beget in every one an inclination to please his superiors, and to form himself upon those models, which are the most acceptable to people of condition and education. Politeness of manners, therefore, arises most naturally in monarchies and courts; and where that flourishes, none of the liberal arts will be altogether neglected or despised.[75]

If rhetoric, criticism and discovery presuppose the encounter between equals, in a republican government or a *république des lettres*, 'polite manners' and 'the polite arts' presuppose an encounter between deference and condescension, in a hierarchy of clients and patrons[76] well known to the ancient world but better realised in the civilised monarchies of the modern. Manners, and the arts that go with them, we are now being informed, are less immediately the creation of commerce than of courts; and the relation between the two is fundamental to our understanding of the *ancien régime*. Commerce operates with something like an equal force among the republics and monarchies of modern Europe, but produces diverse cultural effects among them; and therefore, Hume has already concluded,

> nothing is more favourable to the rise of politeness and learning, than a number of neighbouring and independent states, connected together by commerce and policy.[77]

It is the post-Utrecht Enlightenment; politeness and commerce flourish together, and do so better in a commonwealth of independent states than in a universal monarchy ancient or modern, or in that of China where the monarch is not a despot only because polite manners are themselves despotic. After the Roman empire and the papal monarchy, the history of Europe is the history of a diversity of states, and in the commonwealth of Europe there can be commerce between monarchies

[75] Miller, pp. 126–7.
[76] It was from patronage, however, that Hume was glad to have escaped as an author; Miller, pp. xxxviii–xxxix ('My Own Life'). [77] Miller, p. 119.

and republics, between the polite arts and the free sciences. The origins of historiography in rhetoric seem to place it in the latter column; but there could be a history of civilisation, and of historiography, which should trace the rise of all these dualities. But here the problem of gender surfaces yet again. If polite manners depend on a relation between superior and inferior, Hume is insistent on the place among them of what he calls 'gallantry'.

> As nature has given man the superiority above woman, by endowing him with greater strength both of mind and body; it is his part to alleviate that superiority, as much as possible, by the generosity of his behavior, and by a studied deference and complaisance for all her inclinations and opinions. Barbarous nations display this superiority, by reducing their females to the most abject slavery; by confining them, by beating them, by selling them, by killing them. But the male sex, among a polite people, discover their authority in a more generous, though not a less evident manner; by civility, by respect, by complaisance, and, in a word, by gallantry.[78]

Women, then, remain the objects of condescension in a paternal and deferential relationship, out of which civilised manners and the polite arts arise, so that they are essential and not marginal to the process; and the history which they are urged to study is both the record and the effect of their transition from slavery to gallantry, but not to agency. This historiography looks like one of the polite arts that flourish in a hierarchy, whereas the masculine history of arcane statecraft is one of the sciences that require equality. But this is not the case; philosophical history, the history of manners that includes a history of women, is – we have been told – a science, because it permits of generalisations and general laws, and it is necessary if men are to enlarge historical understanding beyond the ancient or the barbaric. The republic is to study the monarchy and attain a more philosophical knowledge of itself; but women, living under domestic monarchy, are to read the history of manners without writing the history of freedom. Hume was to encounter a woman historian who insisted on doing the latter.

The free yet hierarchical society, the politics driven by both virtue and patronage, both liberty and authority, which Hume wished to scrutinise and with due caution to recommend to his readers in Walpolean Britain, had one further characteristic which needed to be historically understood: the rage of party, which had been only partly swept under the carpet by the establishment of Whig oligarchy and the

[78] Miller, p. 133.

marginalisation of Tories as potential Jacobites after 1714. In the *Essays* of 1741–2, Hume considered the phenomenon of party in an English setting; he did not examine its history in Scotland, where as he once remarked there were no Tories, only Jacobites, and as he might have added no country party, only the memory of the Covenants. The puzzling character of English party, with its unstable mixture of dynastic conflict, ecclesiastical conflict, and the conflict of court and country, was already the subject of a literature of analysis; there had been Rapin de Thoyras's *Dissertation sur les Whigs et les Torys* in 1717 and Bolingbroke's *Dissertation on Parties* in 1733. Hume was at ease with neither author; he wished to maintain that most Tories were resigned to the Hanoverian succession and its parliamentarian implications, but though this brought him close to contending with Bolingbroke that the distinction between Whig and Tory had become meaningless and only that between court and country (or patriot) remained, he affixed to later editions of the *Essays* a footnote warning that he had modified his position in the *History of England*.[79] He meant, in all probability, that as he wrote the *History* he had become increasingly sympathetic to the Stuart monarchy's predicaments in the seventeenth century. The Hume of the 1760s speaks in this footnote, convinced that monarchy is necessary to both government and the maintenance of a polite order, but decreasingly certain that the Hanoverian compromise is going to endure. There was a transformation of party dramatised by the accession of George III, and Hume ended his days convinced that the recrudescence of faction in Britain rendered Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* a better history than the English had a right to expect.[80] Thirty-five years before his death, 'parties in general' and 'the parties of Great Britain'[81] had presented a different spectacle and a different set of problems.

In 1741–2, Hume had distinguished between parties of 'interest' and 'principle', adding:

> Parties from *principle*, especially abstract speculative principle, are known only to modern times, and are, perhaps, the most extraordinary and unaccountable *phaenomenon*, that has yet appeared in human affairs.[82]

In reading this sentence, we must beware of the persistent ambiguities of the term 'modern'. If we take it in its Enlightened and post-ecclesiasti-

[79] Miller, p. 72. [80] Above, n. 31.
[81] Both were titles of essays in the 1741 volume; Miller, p. xii, n. 5.
[82] Miller, p. 60 ('Of Politics in General').

cal sense, 'abstract speculative principle' will seem to denote ideologies of political, social and historical belief, the new fanaticism which Burke was to denounce in *Reflections on the Revolution in France.* Parties founded on secular convictions of this kind were beginning to appear in the later years of Hume's life, and he may well have been aware of them. But to understand what he was saying in 1741–2, it may be necessary to resort to the older usage which employed 'modern' to denote the post-ancient, so that it included the whole of the Christian millennium and the 'middle ages'; in which case the 'abstract speculative principle' will seem to refer to theological and ecclesiological belief. This seems to have been Hume's meaning in the passage quoted, since he goes on immediately to remark:

> Where different principles beget a contrariety of conduct, which is the case with all different political principles, the matter may be more easily explained . . . But where the difference of principle is attended with no contrariety of action, but every one may follow his own way, without interfering with his neighbour, as follows in all religious controversies; what madness, what fury can beget such unhappy and such fatal divisions?

We have collided suddenly with the deepest challenge posed to itself by the Enlightened mind. On the one hand, Hume is proclaiming its belief that differences in religious dispute are utterly without consequences for practical behaviour, because they are about propositions which are not merely insoluble, not merely unintelligible, but consequently about nothing at all. A war between humans of different skin colours is at least about the evidence of the senses:

> The difference of complexion is a sensible and a real difference: But the controversy about an article of faith, which is utterly absurd and unintelligible, is not a difference in sentiment, but in a few phrases and expressions, which one party accepts of, without understanding them; and the other refuses in the same manner.[83]

On the other hand, like it or not, 'modern' human beings do divide on the basis of these convictions,

> and a proof that court and country are not our only parties, is, that almost all the dissenters side with the court, and the lower clergy, at least, of the church of ENGLAND, with the opposition. This may convince us, that some biass still

[83] Miller, p. 59; he has just mentioned a war between blacks and whites in Morocco as a ridiculous spectacle.

> hangs upon our constitution, some extrinsic weight, which turns it from its natural course, and causes a confusion in our parties.[84]

Given the axiom that religious distinctions are utterly without meaning, it has to be explained why human beings continue to invest them with meaning, and why there is inescapably a component of ecclesiology in the complex makeup of English political parties. This cannot be explained by means of a history of argument which supposes that antagonists know what they mean by their language, and use it to mobilise and explore new meanings; since *ex hypothesi* the Christian language means nothing at all. There is possible only a social pathology, an explanation of how human minds become obsessed with the unmeaning. We have reached a point where Hume's dislike of Christianity, and organised religion in general, is absolute and uncompromising. He has no project of doing away with it and replacing it by another metaphysics, because he thinks the human mind sure to go on producing it. The solution is to write its history, natural and civil; and here he begins to construct new hypotheses, that prove to be of the greatest value to his historical thinking, and to Gibbon's. It was to be a question how such a history could be written and debated, in a society both religious and free.

The two essays on party are succeeded by 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm',[85] which in a sense offers to explain the reasons why an unnatural bias or extrinsic weight still hangs upon the British constitution. The explanation is given in terms of a pathology of religious belief, which entails a pathology of the human mind, and is in that sense an exposition of its nature; 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' prepares the way for the much more ambitious *The Natural History of Religion*, which stands apart from the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, though it is printed with them in some of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, of which Gibbon possessed several editions. 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' explains that all religious error (it may be that all religion is an error) falls into one or other of these categories. Superstition arises from the mind's weaknesses and fears; it drives humans to propitiate unknown powers by ceremonies, sacrifices and the pursuit of omens, all of which are peculiarly susceptible to exploitation by priests, who offer themselves as the intermediaries and thaumaturges of communication with the unseen. Enthusiasm is very different; it arises at an opposite

[84] Miller, p. 72 ('Of The Parties of Great Britain'). This essay contains no discussion of parties in Scotland. [85] Miller, pp. 73–9; published in 1741.

pole of the mind's overweening confidence in its own powers, which induce it to believe that its imaginations and delusions are evidence of its immediate communication with the unseen divine, which has entered into it in the form of inspiration and rendered the intervention of priests no longer necessary.[86]

Before going further with this analysis, we must take account of a highly important passage from the earlier 'Of Parties in General'.

> There is another cause (besides the authority of the priests, and the separation of the ecclesiastical and civil powers) which has contributed to render CHRISTENDOM the scene of religious wars and divisions. Religions, that arise in ages totally ignorant and barbarous, consist mostly of traditional tales and fictions, which may be different in every sect, without being contrary to each other; and even when they are contrary, every one adheres to the tradition of his own sect, without much reasoning or disputation. But as philosophy was widely spread over the world, at the time when Christianity arose, the teachers of the new sect were obliged to form a system of speculative opinions; to divide, with some accuracy, their articles of faith; and to explain, comment, confute and defend with all the subtlety of argument and science. Hence naturally arose keenness in dispute, when the Christian religion came to be split into new divisions and heresies: And this keenness assisted the priests in their policy, of begetting a mutual hatred and antipathy among their deluded followers. Sects of philosophy, in the ancient world, were more zealous than parties of religion; but in modern times,[87] parties of religion are more furious and enraged than the most cruel factions that ever arose from interest and ambition.[88]

This image of the transition from a mythopoeic religion whose propositions laid no claim to truth-status, to a philosophic religion which claimed certainty for its statements about the godhead, could be very closely associated with the transition from polytheism to monotheism; so much so that in *The Natural History of Religion* Hume had to maintain the association between philosophic religion and Christianity by averring, not too convincingly, that

> it is a matter of fact incontestable, that about 1700 years ago all mankind were idolaters. The doubtful and sceptical principles of a few philosophers, or the theism, and that too not entirely pure, of one or two nations, form no objection worth regarding.[89]

The assertion, in which Hume himself clearly does not entirely believe, that Christianity was the first monotheism could be used to undermine

[86] Miller, p. 74. [87] Note this use of 'modern' to mean 'Christian'. [88] Miller, pp. 62–3.
[89] Hume, 1757, p. 3.

both the Christian claim that it was the perfection of the *prisca theologia* and the deist claim that a universal prevalence of rational monotheisms rendered it unnecessary. With *The Natural History of Religion* we are on the way towards the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and their assertion that there is in fact no such thing – though d'Alembert might have pointed out that the absence of monotheism from a philosophic history of the mind need not entail its absence from the actual history of religion. But with the advent of philosophy, in the ancient sense of the word, all is changed. Statements about the gods become statements about the universe; they may be either true or false, and their necessary importance to human destiny renders it imperative to ascertain the one and confute the other. Intolerance and persecution become possible and inevitable, and it is far from clear that the philosophers are merely the agents of the priests in bringing this about. Which of the two, after all, invented monotheism, the doctrine of the one true God? While philosophy may have become on occasion the ally of superstition, it is beginning to look like a principal author of enthusiasm, in which the mind passes from believing that it can know God without the intervention of priests to believing that it is God's immediate vehicle, infused, inspired and possessed by the godhead. If enthusiasm had existed in the pre-Platonic world, it had been the creation of prophets, emerging from the desert to cry the word of the Lord; but the Enlightened mind took little account of Hebraic antiquity, and recognised the prophet chiefly in the form of the legislator as benign impostor, whose pretensions were more likely to beget superstition and priestcraft than enthusiasm, and to represent the latter as philosophic rather than prophetic. To escape both sets of horrors, however, we must embark on the enterprise of enlightenment, the replacement of ancient philosophy which believed it could speak of God (or with him) by a modern philosophy which recognised that it could speak of anything else but that; and we must begin moving the moment of modernity from the beginning of the Christian millennium to its end. Hume was further engaged in showing that enthusiasm could play an unexpected role in bringing this about.

'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm' may, chronologically speaking, have been a source for the conviction, to be found also in the *Essai sur les moeurs*, that enthusiasm, once it took the form of a quietism from which apocalyptic expectations were rapidly disappearing, would act as a source of enlightenment. 'Our sectaries', wrote Hume,

who were formerly such dangerous bigots, are now become very free reasoners; and the *quakers* seem to approach nearly the only regular body of *deists* in the universe, the *literati*, or the disciples of CONFUCIUS in CHINA.[90]

It was the function of enthusiasm to sweep away priestcraft (in China this might never have existed), and once they had done so, enthusiasts left the mind confronted with the choice between God, society and itself. In the philosophers' benign scenarios they chose the second, recognised themselves as sociable and within their republican limits polite beings, and were content to follow the practices and obey the laws of society. Their religion was seldom cultic, since it lacked priests, and since it lacked theologians was capable of becoming philosophic in the modern sense; the virtuous Quaker or Anabaptist of Enlightened mythology was a child of nature, akin to the noble savage, and in the supremely satisfying case of Benjamin Franklin a Newtonian philosopher and natural scientist as well. Hume did not entertain such visions; he pronounced indeed that enthusiasm was normally a friend to civil liberty, but his conviction that there was no end to the tensions between liberty and authority obliged him to see enthusiasm as an actor in a complex and ambivalent history. We shall see of what importance these generalisations about superstition and enthusiasm, religion and philosophy, are in the construction of Hume's *History of England*. They are of even greater importance in the construction of the *Decline and Fall*, where the roles of superstition and enthusiasm come at times close to being reversed.

The *Political Discourses* of 1752, incorporated with the *Essays Moral, Political and Literary* in later editions, consist broadly speaking of a series of essays in what was coming to be termed political economy;[91] an important essay 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', which is Hume's major work on the differences between classical and modern civilisation;[92] and a concluding group of studies of the chief political principles established, yet still contested, at the basis of the Hanoverian regime.[93] The first group may be included in the history of economic thought, but do not contribute to its autonomy or subsequent divorce

[90] Miller, p. 78. Hume is not considering the possibility that Chinese thought was not theist at all.

[91] 'Of Commerce' (Miller, pp. 253–67), 'Of Money' (pp. 281–94), 'Of Interest' (pp. 295–307), 'Of the Balance of Trade' (pp. 308–26), 'Of the Jealousy of Trade' (pp. 327–31), 'Of Taxes' (pp. 342–8). Collected in Eugene Rotwein (ed.), *David Hume: Writings on Economics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970). [92] Miller, pp. 377–464.

[93] 'Of the Original Contract' (Miller, pp. 465–87), 'Of Passive Obedience', (pp. 488–92), 'Of the Protestant Succession' (pp. 502–11). 'Of the Coalition of Parties' (pp. 493–501) anticipates arguments developed in the *History of England*.

from the other social sciences; they retain a moral, political and literary character, since they include 'Of Refinement in the Arts', which is a study of the moral and historical problem of luxury, and 'Of the Balance of Power', which is a history of the rise and fall of the threat of universal empire and a warning to Great Britain against continuing an opposition to French hegemony in Europe beyond the point where that threat has ceased to be a real one. In all these essays, then, Hume is investigating the historical conditions which underlie modern commercial society and its government; we are concerned not only with political economy, but with the historical conditions making such a discourse possible for the first time. He is not a mere celebrant of modernity, however; like most Enlightened historians he thinks its achievement precarious and probably impermanent, and in the essay 'Of Public Credit'[94] investigates the agency most likely to bring commercial government, and the European republic of commercial states, to ruin. If national debt brings a society, or a chain of societies, to a condition where the value of money, and so the value of all property, is determined by the degree of its indebtedness to anonymous cosmopolitan creditors, all power will be transferred to the latter and can no longer arise from the social relations generated by property within the several societies. It will be the death of the state, and the death of the political (even the social) community. We are looking, perhaps, at Hume's prophecy of our own times; though he thinks the international creditors more likely to display 'a stupid and pampered luxury'[95] than an unending frenzy of insider trading and currency speculation, and devotes the essay to comparing the solutions to credit dependency likely to be sought within increasingly desperate political societies. There may be an 'easy death' in which they resign themselves to permanent bankruptcy, or a 'violent death' in which they throw off dependency by repudiating their debts.[96] The language recalls Hume's earlier enquiry into the 'euthanasia of the British constitution' and the violence of its republican alternative, and forecasts the conviction of his last years that the vast increase of national debt in the Seven Years War, and the pursuit of empire in America, had brought about a crisis in British politics, in which the choice between absolute monarchy and republic might have to be made.[97] Hume contemplated the advent of the dangerous and revolutionary world in which Gibbon wrote the *Decline and Fall*, and it is important to remember that he died in the

[94] Miller, pp. 349–65. Istvan Hont, 'The Rhapsody of Public Debt: David Hume and Voluntary State Bankruptcy', in Phillipson and Skinner, 1993, pp. 321–48. [95] Miller, p. 357.

[96] Miller, pp. 363, 365. [97] Pocock, 1985, pp. 127, 133, 136.

conviction that the history he had written was very probably the history of a failure. It is therefore also important to remember that he conducted the narrative of that history only as far as 1688, to the beginnings of that regime of whose continuance he was never certain and became less so as the years passed.

CHAPTER 13

The History of Great Britain: *Hume's modern history*

The History of Great Britain, vol. I, *containing the Reigns of James I and Charles I*, was published at Edinburgh in 1754, and a second volume on the later Stuarts followed in 1756. They became the concluding volumes, V and VI, of a *History of England*, of which III and IV, the history of the Tudors, appeared in 1759, and I and II, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Accession of Henry VII*, in 1762, when the six volumes of *The History of England* appeared as a complete series, and Gibbon's authorial career began as Hume's essentially ended. It is improbable that Hume ever had, let alone abandoned, the intention of writing a history of Britain as that of both kingdoms, and he may have used 'the History of Great Britain' in 1754 for no other reason than that the appellation became appropriate from the moment of the Union of the Crowns. As early as 1752, he defended in a letter to Adam Smith his decision 'to begin an English history' at the accession of James I rather than Henry VII, and spoke of it as 'our history',[98] and subsequently of the historians of England as 'our historians'.[99] His circle of Scots knew quite well that Scotland, and Ireland, possessed their own histories, and when Hume's narrative enters these nations we are left in no doubt that we have entered other worlds; yet there is a 'we', which includes Scots and could have included Anglo-Irish, whose members can look on English history as 'ours'. The reason is that 'we' are Enlightened historians; Enlightened history is the history of the modern state; and the state of which 'we' are now members is the kingdom of England, whose enlargement into the 'enormous monarchy' (a Humean phrase) of Great Britain is explained by former English history and the history of 'Europe' generally. This does not mean that Scottish, and Irish, history cannot, or must not, be understood in terms of their own providing; only

[98] *History*, I, p. xii. Greig, 1932, vol. I, p. 168. [99] *History*, I, p. xiii.

that the narrative in which they must be included is the narrative of English history.

Richard Hurd maliciously observed that Hume wrote his history 'as witches say their prayers, backwards'. It was the supposed intention of witches thus to empty prayer of its meaning and reverse its effect; Hurd was echoing Warburton's remark that Hume, 'an atheistical Jacobite', was a 'monster' as a historian, as well as Hume's own remark that his history was received with execration by all parties, confessions and nations.[100] But there is a deeper significance to the circumstance that the *History of England* was written in reverse chronological order: Stuarts first, then Tudors, then Roman, barbarous and medieval. We have seen that the *Essays* explore the historical preconditions of the Hanoverian regime and its problematic future. The *History of Great Britain* explores the history of the Stuarts in all three kingdoms with a view to showing what government, society and historical experience generally were like just before those conditions came into being, and how far the actions of men contributed to their establishment. Hume then found that though 1603 might be 'the best period at which to begin', it was not a point from which a beginning could be made *ex nihilo*; Stuart rule had its historical preconditions in Tudor England, and Tudor rule its preconditions in medieval; and so he was led, a little against his will, to go back to as near a beginning as it was possible to go – a problem the opposite of Gibbon's, who was obliged to go forward in search of an ending. But Hume also embarked on the long journey from the *Essays* – themselves the product of a move away from the *Treatise of Human Nature* – into the *History*, and it was this which made him a major contributor to the solution of the problem of English historiography.

From the advent of 'philosophy' in the 'polite' sense of the term, that problem can be stated as a reformulation of Momigliano's problem: the reconciliation of philosophy with erudition, and of both with narrative. Having failed to communicate his philosophy as metaphysics, Hume turned in the *Essays* to communicating it in the form of polite letters, but found these in turn to be a phenomenon in the history of English politics, European civility, universal religion and the human mind; he therefore became involved in writing the history of England in all these settings. The *Essays* had considered the problems of unintended consequences, cultural transformations, and general laws in the writing of history; and had asked, in a context of gender differentiation, how

[100] Miller, p. xxxvii ('My Own Life').

history of this kind was to be conjoined with the history of particular human actions, which it might illustrate but could not explain. The *History of Great Britain*, and the *History of England* which it became, adopted from the outset – and surely not unthinkingly – the convention of writing history by reigns.[101] It therefore became a history of the actions of kings, their counsellors and courtiers, their subjects and opponents; a narrative of human deeds which could be written, first in obedience to the historian's duty of reporting what the historians of the times had reported themselves, second as an exercise in the Tacitist craft and mystery of exploring the *arcana imperii*, the springs of human action and the sources of human error. The history of the kingdom was necessarily the narrative of kingship, and this masculine historiography remained intact, from the first barbarian warlord who might be said to have pursued coherent intentions, to the polished and commercial statecraft of the present day. Voltaire, Hume, Robertson and Gibbon therefore continued to write classical history in the neo-classical manner; but the British triumvirate – with Gibbon as a special case – display a peculiar concern with ascertaining the general laws under which modern government, commercial and polite, can exist and the actions of statesmen and statecraft intersect with them. As inhabitants of a constitutional monarchy deeply divided into factions, they have occasion to study such history, and do not go in pursuit of a history of philosophy alternative to the history of the state. The state is not so secure that the history of its conditionality can be set aside.

There is a further consequence to Hume's choice of a reverse chronology; one which might almost be said to have occasioned it. The general conditions in which he is most interested are those governing the conduct of modern government; they are not much older than it, and there is a history both of how they came into operation, and of what human affairs were like before they did. From the Britain of the Hanoverians Hume looks back to the England and Scotland of the Stuarts, the England – since that is where the narrative lies – of the Tudors, the Lancastrians, the Plantagenets and so back to the barbarians of the Heptarchy. At each stage of the retrospect the question can be asked what general conditions governed human conduct then, and how they gave way to the conditions that succeeded them; but it does not simply follow that the *History of England* pursues a programme of

[101] The most careful and illuminating studies of Hume's historiography are those of Giarrizzo, 1962; Norton and Popkin, 1965; Forbes, 1975; Wexler, 1979; Phillipson, 1989, chs. 4–6; Wootton, 1993; Hicks, 1996, ch. 7; and O'Brien, 1997.

research into the governing conditions of increasingly remote societies. There is the narrative of war and statecraft to be pursued as well; and not only could it be shown that human action operated differently under different historical conditions, but it could be asked also whether the relation between individual action and historical condition had not itself increased exponentially. James Harrington had suggested that the Tacitist study of reason of state was no more than the study of statecraft in the decay of 'Gothic' monarchy,[102] and Voltaire and du Chatelet had considered that society had once been so barbaric that there were no actions whose history deserved to be written, and therefore no historians claiming to write it. Hume, however, did not write in the society of an Emilie du Chatelet, but of his English fellow-Britons who insisted on studying the remotest past under the paradigm of the ancient constitution. In this he did not believe; but he had to continue arguing against it.

To read the volumes of the *History* in the order in which they were written – Gibbon, possessing the complete editions of 1770 and 1778, may of course have begun with the Romans and read on – is to experience retroactively the construction of generalisations and their interweaving with political narrative. The letter of 1752 to Adam Smith is an early example. Hume says:

> I confess, I was once of the same Opinion with you, and thought that the best Period to begin an English History was about Henry the 7th. But you will please to observe, that the Change, which then happen'd in public Affairs, was very insensible, and did not display its Influence till many Years afterwards. 'Twas under James that the House of Commons began first to raise their Head, and then the Quarrel betwixt Privilege and Prerogative commenc'd. The Government, no longer opprest by the enormous Authority of the Crown, display'd its Genius; and the Factions, which then arose, having an Influence on our present Affairs, form the most curious, interesting and instructive Part of our History.[103]

Hume's language recalls what he is in process of rejecting. After an account of the reign of Elizabeth, James Harrington had written:

> And by these degrees came the house of commons to raise that head, which since hath been so high and formidable unto their princes that they have looked pale upon those assemblies.[104]

Bacon and Harrington had supposed that Henry VII's statutes regarding retainers and alienations had rapidly terminated the military power

[102] Pocock, 1977, pp. 124–5, 851–4, especially 853.
[103] Above, p. 199, n. 98. Hume did not really alter this decision in resolving to go back and write two volumes of Tudor history. [104] Pocock, 1977, p. 198.

of the nobility, and produced the social situation of which the Civil War was the outcome. Hume not only wanted to know what had happened in the century and a half between Henry VII and Charles I, Bosworth and Edgehill; he favoured an account of social change at the end of the fifteenth century a good deal more complex than a few acts of parliament could explain; and over and above all this, he had come to believe that government rested on opinion, that human knowledge of the world surrounding the senses was very largely a matter of opinion, and that consequently it was changes of opinion that moved history and whose sources the historian must endeavour to explain. The corresponding passage in the *History of Great Britain* was:

> About this period, the minds of men, throughout Europe, especially in England, seem to have undergone a general, but insensible revolution. Though letters had been revived in the preceding age, they were chiefly cultivated by [men of] sedentary professions; nor had they, till now, begun to spread themselves, in any degree, among men of the world. Arts, both mechanical and liberal, were every day receiving great improvements. Navigation had extended itself over the whole globe. Travelling was secure and agreeable. And the general system of politics, in Europe, was become more enlarged and comprehensive.
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> In consequence of this universal fermentation, the ideas of men enlarged themselves on all sides; and the several constituent parts of the gothic governments, which seem to have lain long unactive, began, every where, to operate and encroach on each other. On the continent, where the necessity of discipline had begotten standing armies, the princes commonly established an unlimited authority, and overpowered, by force or intrigue, the liberties of the people. In England, the love of freedom, which, unless checked, flourishes extremely in all liberal natures, acquired new force, and was regulated by more enlarged views, suitably to that cultivated understanding, which became, every day, more common, among men of birth and education. A familiar acquaintance with the precious remains of antiquity excited in every generous breast a passion for a limited constitution, and begat an emulation of those manly virtues, which the Greek and Roman authors, by such animating examples, as well as pathetic expressions, recommend to us. The severe, though popular, government of Elizabeth had confined this rising spirit within very narrow bounds: But when a new and a foreign family succeeded to the throne, and a prince less dreaded and less beloved; symptoms immediately appeared of a more free and independent genius in the nation.[105]

This liberal enlightenment is the prelude to a disastrous civil and religious war, and the reader of the *Essays* will be in doubt whether the

[105] *History*, v, pp. 18–19. Todd's edition, cited here as most convenient, follows Hume's finally corrected text, published posthumously in 1778. Cf. Hume, 1762, vol. v, pp. 14–15. The 1754 text was reprinted in Forbes, 1970, here pp. 82–3.

Greeks and Romans understood what a limited constitution was. Hume is insisting that it was the enlargement of the mind's workings which mattered, rather than the redistribution of armed power which followed the liquidation of feudal tenures, and that this was brought about by changes in printing and navigation, rather than by acts of parliament directed at noble power. He is somewhat closer to Harrington, however, when he says that as the mind turned its enlarged capacities towards 'the gothic governments', their 'several parts began to operate and encroach on each other'. Hume is introducing his belief that there was no such thing as a coherent 'ancient constitution', only an unlimited prerogative in the king, an unlimited power of resistance in the feudal nobility, and an unlimited reverence for law which there was no means of enforcing but by violence. Harrington, who had described Gothic society as a 'wrestling match' between king and nobility,[106] would not have disagreed; but there remained the problem of what had brought it to an end: a change in the distribution of property, or a change in the character of propertied culture? Hume was of the latter opinion; it was men's way of seeing the world that had changed their way of seeing their own government; but how had they expressed that change in perceptions? The rise of a high-minded civic humanism was part of the story, but not the whole of it.

The absence – but at the same time the presence – of an ancient constitution is the key to much in both Hume's reading of English history and the structure of his historiography. Of James I's dissolution of parliament in 1614 he says:

> In vain did he plead, in excuse for this violence,[107] the example of Elizabeth and other princes of the line of Tudor, as well as Plantagenet. The people and the parliament, without abandoning for ever all their liberties and privileges, could acquiesce in none of these precedents, how ancient and frequent soever. And were the authority of such precedents admitted, the utmost, that could be inferred is, that the constitution of England was, at that time, an inconsistent fabric, whose jarring and discordant parts must soon destroy each other, and from the dissolution of the old, beget some new form of civil government, more uniform and consistent.[108]

Hume – who may have taken a not dissimilar view of the breakdown of the Roman republic[109] – is telling us here that the English were governed by ancient law, which enabled them to allege ancient precedents with a passionate conviction that made them exceptional among the European monarchies; but that the precedents were not consistent with one another, that they pointed only to prerogative on one side and privilege of parliament on the other, and that consequently there was no constitution in the sense of a settled relationship between the two. This – the theme is a constant in his later volumes on earlier history – was the sum total of the medieval or Gothic achievement, perhaps all that could be expected under barbarian and feudal conditions. But these conditions were now changing, and Hume is obliged to look back from the accession of James I to that of Henry VII, and to see developments since the latter's time as part of a general European pattern.

[106] Pocock, 1977, p. 196.
[107] The allusion is to the imprisonment of some members at the dissolution.
[108] *History*, v, p. 59; Hume, 1762, v, p. 50; Forbes 1970, pp. 133–4.
[109] Miller, pp. 16, 25, 370–3.

> After the discovery and conquest of the West Indies, gold and silver became every day more plentiful in England, as well as in the rest of Europe; and the price of all commodities and provisions rose to a height beyond what had been known, since the declension of the Roman empire. As the revenue of the crown rose not in proportion, the prince was insensibly reduced to poverty amidst the general riches of his subjects, and required additional funds, in order to support the same magnificence and force, which had been maintained by former monarchs . . . Some equality too, and proportion to the other sovereigns of Europe, it was natural for him to desire; and as they had universally enlarged their revenue and multiplied their taxes, the king of England deemed it reasonable, that his subjects, who were generally as rich as theirs, should bear with patience some additional burthens and impositions.
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> Unhappily for the king, those very riches, with the encreasing knowledge of the age, bred opposite sentiments in his subjects; and begetting a spirit of freedom and independence, disposed them to pay little regard, either to the entreaties or menaces of their sovereign. While the barons possessed their former immense property and extensive jurisdictions, they were apt, at every disgust, to endanger the monarch and throw the whole government into confusion: But this confusion often, in its turn, proved favourable to the monarch, and made the nation again submit to him, in order to re-establish justice and tranquillity. After the power of alienations, as well as the encrease of commerce, had thrown the balance of property into the hands of the commons, the situation of affairs and the dispositions of men became susceptible of a more regular plan of liberty; and the laws were not supported singly by the authority of the sovereign. And though in that interval, after the decline of the peers and before the people had yet experienced their force, the princes assumed an exorbitant power, and had almost annihilated the constitution under the weight of their prerogative; as soon as the commons recovered from their lethargy, they seem to have been astonished at the danger, and were resolved to secure liberty by firmer barriers, than their ancestors had hitherto provided for it.[110]

[110] *History*, v, pp. 39–40; Hume, 1762, v, pp. 30–1; Forbes 1970, pp. 107–8.

Hume is using Harrington's language (the 'balance of property') to make Harrington's point: the barons struck at the king, the commons (however reluctantly) at the crown. But writing a century after *Oceana* (1656), he is aware that the commons had ended by confirming both monarchy and aristocracy in new and modern forms. Until they had learned how to do so, he is telling us, they were condemned to try solving their modern problems by the use of medieval language; and though Hume will join both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century observers in insisting that the Great Rebellion was profoundly unlike a baronial revolt, he is able to indicate that in 1660 it ended not unlike one, in the restoration of a monarchy which had been overthrown by subjects unable to do without it. The problem, however, was modern, not medieval, and the Restoration had not finally solved it.

The post-medieval English had continued thinking and acting in medieval terms: the language of prerogative, precedent and privilege, rooted in an ancient law but not an ancient constitution (they had misused the last word in so calling their system); and the tragedy of this language was that it permitted claims of equal validity to be made by either party.

> The turbulent government of England, ever fluctuating between privilege and prerogative, would afford a variety of precedents, which might be pleaded on both sides. In such delicate questions, the people must be divided: The arms of the state were still in their hands: A civil war must ensue: a civil war, where no party or both parties must justly bear the blame, and where the good and virtuous would scarcely know what vows to form; were it not that liberty, so necessary to the perfection of human society, would be sufficient to byass their affections towards the side of its defenders.[111]

But Hume was convinced that authority was as necessary as liberty, and that the last word could never be said on behalf of either. This, coupled with his dislike of the radical ancient-constitutionalism revived in the first decades of George III's reign, led him to make many revisions in his text, stressing those occasions when Charles I could be said to have acted in good faith or sincerity of conviction, or when a strong case could be made for his actions.[112] These contestations of the whiggish insistence that Charles was always in the wrong are, however, surface phenomena of Hume's historical thinking. He was convinced that the seventeenth-century English were in the predicament that their enlarged minds were not synchronised with their still medieval institutions and language, and it troubled him to see his contemporaries behaving as if seventeenth-century discourse were still valid when, in his view, it never had been. He therefore wrote a history which showed actors in the great disaster of Charles I's reign behaving and arguing in sincere conviction, but condemned by their predicament to regard actors on the other side as their enemies, hostile in intention and false in language; the whole culminating in the catastrophe of 1642, when king and parliament sought to forestall one another in mobilising the militia, and converted a war of words into a war of swords. Hume's strategy, we must next note, had the most important consequences for his handling of the central problem of eighteenth-century historiography: the reconciliation of narrative and philosophy.

[111] *History*, v, p. 96; Hume, 1762, vol. v, p. 84; Forbes, 1970, p. 185. Should 'vows' be 'views'?
[112] Miller, pp. xxxviii, 492; *History*, pp. 542–6; Phillipson, 1989, pp. 90–3.

The central obligation of the neo-classical historian was to follow the ancient historians, or those contemporary with the event, in reporting what they had told him. In Hume's medieval volumes, there are instances of his following such an authority while indicating, in a footnote or even in the text, that he does not altogether believe what he is required to say. But the greatest of the ancients, Thucydides and Tacitus, and their modern disciples, had enlarged narrative by adding the dimension of *ragione di stato* and *arcana imperii*, in which were made partly visible the springs of human conduct and the sources of human miscalculation. They had made possible a further dimension of tragedy and another of rhetoric, in which could be stated the arguments for and against a certain course of action, the terms in which one side and the other presented their opposing views, the interpretation or explanation advanced by one historian or another in narrating the same sequence of events. A large part of what was meant by calling a historian 'philosophic' consisted in his ability to perform these exercises. Hume uses them all to the full, and thus keeps received narrative in its full neo-classical form alive from beginning to end of the *History of England*. But in his first and last volume, the *History of Great Britain* dealing with the century from 1603 to 1688, he adds the further dimension of historical specificity and anachronism. That is to say, he is able to show the speech, thought and actions of his characters as performed under certain historical conditions, as produced by those conditions, and as failing to keep pace with change in those conditions; with the result that the *arcana imperii*, which explain or at least dramatise how it is that human actions produce undesired results, cease to be only the *arcana* of state, of fortune, of the passions of the heart, and become the *arcana* of

historical change and continuity. The generalisations needed to produce accounts of historical conditions and processes blend with the more ancient skills of political narrative to produce a historiography 'philosophical' in the eighteenth-century sense.

It must be emphasised, however, that the two do not blend to the point of forming a single narrative or metanarrative. The reasons are in part literary: the reporting and even the exploration of the deeds of ruling individuals is differently constructed, answers to different canons, and has different aims from the construction of generalisations concerning the manners and opinions prevalent at various times, or their infrastructure in property and commerce. It is a problem for Hume, as for Robertson, Gibbon and all their peers, to determine when the two modes should form a single narrative, and when the latter should be relegated to footnotes, appendices or separate chapters, so as not to impair the unbroken flow of the true 'history' which is the former. He does not adopt the easy recourse of dismissing classical narrative as merely recording the deeds of conquerors, and of no significance compared with explaining the genesis of a civil war which disastrously affected both government and manners; he knows the two to be inseparable. And behind the literary problem lies the philosophical: the history of social and cultural change is written by constructing generalisations and noting conformities and exceptions to them, whereas the narrative of actions is written with the aid of the maxims of reason of state, designed to explain the anomalies of human behaviour rather than subject them to covering laws and predictions. The two modes of historiography – one to be read by women, both to be written by men – are interwoven but never reduced to unity, and the reader exercises her and his taste and judgment in moving back and forth between them. Hume is the first of British historians to master the writing of history in the double key of political narrative and sociological generalisation.

So far the problem of early modern English history has been stated as the self-destruction under post-medieval conditions of medieval institutions and their accompanying medieval language. There is a further dimension of discourse, and Hume is about to confront what he considers the central absurdity of European history.

> The prerogative of the crown was represented by lawyers as something real and durable; like those eternal essences of the schools, which no time or force could alter. The sanction of religion was, by divines, called in aid; and the monarch of heaven was supposed to be interested in supporting the authority of his earthly vicegerent. And though it is pretended, that these doctrines were more openly

> inculcated and more strenuously insisted on during the reign of the Stuarts, they were not then invented; and were only found by the court to be more necessary at that period, by reason of the opposite doctrines, which *began* to be promulgated by the puritanical party.[113]

In the *History of Great Britain*, Hume included two passages omitted from later editions of the *History of England*,[114] dealing with the Protestant and Catholic confessions as they appeared in the times of James VI and I (for this is a Scottish as well as an English phenomenon). Both are analysed in terms of the antithesis between superstition and enthusiasm, which survives the excision of these passages to be a major tool of Hume's historical interpretation; and his thought on this subject had come a long way since the essay of 1741–2. In 'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', superstition was the instrument of priestcraft, and enthusiasm the friend of civil liberty, both in its destructive phase when it destroyed priestly power and in its benign phase when it converted itself into civil reason and civil religion. The one was the child of fear, the other of over-confidence. By the time of the *History*, however, Hume had been reflecting on priestly religion, and had isolated within it the element of cultic worship, based on the illusory experience of the senses, to which the name 'superstition' had anciently been given. In the ancient world, priests had exploited the sensual credulity of the vulgar, and had made themselves powerful; but in only a few cases – Egypt, the Druids – had they set up an institutional challenge to the civil magistrate and then not by practising the impostures of cultic religion so much as by the mysteries of initiation and metempsychosis – doctrines rather than cults. The cultic religions of antiquity had been benignly viewed by magistrates, who presided over them as socially useful even while despising them as philosophically ridiculous. It was the promulgation of doctrines, above all of philosophical or pseudo-philosophical theology, that induced and enabled the priest to claim authority which rivalled or reduplicated that of the civil magistrate, and since doctrines were ideas rather than sensory phenomena they were closer to enthusiasm than to superstition. This step necessitated a revaluation of what it had been in the Catholic church to which reformers, Protestants and *philosophes* had all objected. Patristic and scholastic theology had encouraged belief in the real presence of God in the flesh, in the church, in the elements; it

[113] *History*, v, p. 127; Hume, 1762, vol. v, pp. 110–12; Forbes, 1970, pp. 222–4. The long footnote which extends the pagination in the older editions was printed as a separate endnote in 1778; pp. 561–3. A further endnote (p. 563) explains the emphasis of 'began' by urging that both passive resistance and limited monarchy are doctrines no older than the Stuart accession.

[114] *History*, I, pp. xiv–xviii; absent in Hume, 1762, vol. v, p. 7; Forbes, 1970, pp. 71–3, 96–9.

had been a philosophic underpinning of superstition. It was to this, and the accompanying claims of the popes and their clergy to a magistracy rivalling the civil, that the Reformation and Enlightenment opposed themselves; not – Hume began to see – to the relatively harmless cults, of shrines and saints and pilgrimages, which satisfied the senses of the vulgar.

> In the preceding state of ignorance and tranquillity, into which mankind were lulled, the attachment to superstition, tho' without reserve, was not extreme; and like the antient pagan idolatry, the popular religion consisted more of exterior practices and observations, than of any principles, which either took possession of the heart, or influenced the conduct. It might have been hoped, that learning and knowledge, as of old in Greece, stealing in gradually, would have opened the eyes of men, and corrected such of the ecclesiastical abuses as were the grossest and most burthensome. It had been observed, that, upon the revival of letters, very generous and enlarged sentiments of religion prevailed thro'out all Italy; and that during the reign of Leo, the court of Rome itself, in imitation of their illustrious prince, had not been wanting in a just sense of freedom . . .
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> The splendour too and pomp of worship, which that religion carefully supports, are agreeable to the taste of magnificence, that prevails in courts, and form a species of devotion, which, while it flatters the pampered senses, gives little perplexity to the indolent understandings, of the great. That delicious country, wherein the Roman pontiff resides, was the source of all modern art and refinement, and diffused on its superstition an air of politeness, which distinguishes it from the gross rusticity of the other sects. And tho' policy made it assume, in some of its monastic orders, that austere mien, which is acceptable to the vulgar; all authority still resided in its prelates and spiritual princes, whose temper, more cultivated and humanized, inclined them to every decent pleasure and indulgence. Like all other species of superstition, it rouses the vain fears of unhappy mortals; but it knows also the secret of alloying these fears, and by exterior rites, ceremonies, and abasements, tho' sometimes at the expense of morals, it reconciles the penitent to his offended deity.[115]

The altars might have been left unstripped.[116] Hume is envisaging an alternative Enlightenment, in which cultic Christianity would have remained intact, to satisfy the vulgar and amuse the nobility, under the patronage of Erasmian scholars in the role of Cicero and enlightened popes like those who had promoted the Renaissance and might yet expel the Jesuits. If civil liberty were the management of an opulent society in which property was mobile and thought politely free, it had no reason to quarrel with superstition, the religion of the senses; and if the princes of the church could be persuaded to relinquish, even without

[115] *History*, I, pp. xvi–xvii. [116] Duffy, 1992.

formally abandoning, their pretensions at the expense of the civil magistrate, there might be no need to light the wildfires of enthusiasm. But this was not what had happened. The reformers, starting with Luther, had challenged the church in its momentarily enlightened luxury, and had forced it to defend itself at all points and altogether, driving it back on the uncivil austerity of the Counter-Reformation. The enthusiasm of the Protestants had stripped the altars and broken the images, spurring the mind to experience itself, alone with God or with its ideas about him; and it was not quite as clear as it had been that this was the path to civil liberty. A Protestant clergy, moved by the independent power of enthusiasm, might challenge the authority and magistracy of civil society as uncompromisingly as any Pope. James VI had had reason to learn this in his Scottish infancy, and even later in his reign over that kingdom

> there prevailed among the greater part of the nation another principle, of the most important and dangerous nature, and which, if admitted, destroyed entirely the validity of all such statutes.[117] The ecclesiastical power was supposed totally independent of the civil; and no act of parliament, nothing but the consent of the church itself, was represented as sufficient ground for the introduction of any change in religious worship or discipline.[118]

This church acknowledged no foreign authority; it said its head was Christ alone; otherwise Calvinist Scotland approached the condition of England in the days of Thomas Becket. Hume was moving towards an Enlightened Erastianism directed at Genevan no less than at Tridentine beliefs. In the parliamentary culture of England, however, the situation was very different, and the power of enthusiasm was to be felt in the intellectual vacuum occasioned by the disintegration of medieval constitutionalism. The English mind, enlarged by its new opportunities, had turned itself on the fabric of government, and found there nothing but prerogative on the one hand and privilege of parliament on the other. In the long interval before new understandings formed themselves, the mind could contain nothing but the sets of vehement opinions which supported either principle, and the Tudor century had elapsed before their incoherence was discovered and the mind found itself distracted to the verge of civil war. But Hume was emphatic in holding that the absolutist half of that mind was as strong as its opposite, and he did not believe that the angry constitutionalism of the early Stuart parliaments would ever have led to a new establishment of liberty and authority. It

[117] Those of James VI regarding the authority of bishops; later those by which Charles I sought to establish a new Scottish liturgy.
[118] *History*, v, p. 253; Hume, 1762, vol. v, p. 217; Forbes, 1970, p. 361.

was therefore the blazing force of enthusiasm which intervened, and for some decades caused the English to defend the liberty of the public as if it had been the liberty of the spirit; a heroic, destructive and appalling spectacle which the Enlightened mind must both applaud and condemn.

> Some persons,[119] partial to the patriots of this age, have ventured to put them in a balance with the most illustrious characters of antiquity; and mentioned the names of Pym, Hambden, Vane, as a just parallel to those of Cato, Brutus, Cassius. Profound capacity, indeed, undaunted courage, extensive enterprize; in these particulars, perhaps the Roman do not much surpass the English worthies: But what a difference, when the discourse, conduct, conversation, and private as well as public behaviour, of both are inspected! The leisure of those noble ancients was totally employed in the study of Grecian eloquence and philosophy; in the cultivation of polite letters and civilized society: The whole discourse and language of the moderns were polluted with mysterious jargon, and full of the lowest and most vulgar hypocrisy.[120]

Before we could trace how the language of constitutional liberty came to be the language of neo-classical enlightenment, we must understand how it had been for a time the language of religious enthusiasm. This had been the case in England rather than in Scotland – or in Ireland, where it had hardly happened at all – because there the constitution had been the means of establishing a church, and the incoherence of thought about the one had been the incoherence of thought about the other. Once it had to be decided how far the Protestant church of England should base itself in Calvinist theology, the question arose of whether a church guided by such doctrines could be obedient to the civil power.

> In tracing the coherence among the systems of modern theology, we may observe, that the doctrine of absolute decrees has ever been intimately connected with the enthusiastic spirit; as that doctrine affords the highest subject of joy, triumph, and security to the supposed elect, and exalts them, by infinite degrees, above the rest of mankind. All the first reformers adopted these principles; and the Jansenists too, a fanatical sect in France, not to mention the Mahometans in Asia, have ever embraced them. As the Lutheran establishments were subject to episcopal jurisdiction, their enthusiastic genius gradually decayed, and men had leisure to perceive the absurdity of supposing God to punish, by infinite torments, what he himself, from all eternity, had unchangeably decreed. The king, though, at this time, his Calvinistic education had rivetted him in the doctrine of absolute decrees, yet, being a zealous partizan of episcopacy, was insensibly engaged, towards the end of his reign, to favour the

[119] John Toland? Catharine Macaulay? The latter did not publish till 1763.
[120] *History*, v, p.304; Hume 1762, vol.v, pp. 259–60; Forbes, 1970, pp. 417–18.

> milder theology of Arminius. Even in so great a doctor, the genius of the religion prevailed over its speculative tenets; and with him, the whole clergy gradually dropped the more rigid principles of absolute reprobation and unconditional decrees. Some noise was, at first, made about these innovations; but being drowned in the fury of factions and civil wars which ensued, the scholastic arguments made an insignificant figure amidst those violent disputes about civil and ecclesiastical power, with which the nation was agitated. And at the restoration, the church, though she still retained her old subscriptions and articles of faith, was found to have totally changed her speculative doctrines, and to have embraced tenets more suitable to the genius of her discipline and worship, without its being possible to assign the exact period, in which the alteration was produced.[121]

But this relatively comfortable gradualism was visible only in the long run. In the short, the Arminian enlightenment, now recognised by Hume as central to the history of Great Britain, operated to produce the most violent dissensions, and he does not represent it as nearly so marginal to the story of civil war as is suggested in the passage just quoted. Here the analysis of religion into superstition and enthusiasm becomes operative. The tenets of Arminius were of course just as scholastic, and therefore to Hume as absurd, as those of his opponents; one band of theologians distracting the civil establishment with incomprehensible disputes is little better than another; but in proportion as they moved the mind away from the enthusiasm of absolute decrees, the Arminians moved it nearer to enthusiasm's necessary opposite. Here Hume recollects that the foundations of the Church of England were Catholic as well as Calvinist, and that the former were composed of cultic practice and ritual as well as of scholastic theology; and he recalls that it is the fanaticism of theology, not the superstitions of the senses, by which humans are led to defy the civil authority and to set up another. His understanding of Anglican duality enables him to explain why the career of Arminianism in England was so very different from what it was elsewhere.

> The Arminians, finding more encouragement from the superstitious spirit of the church than from the fanaticism of the puritans, gradually incorporated themselves with the former; and some of that sect, by the indulgence of James and Charles, had attained the highest preferments in the hierarchy.[122]

What was an anti-clerical, a Socinian and even a deist movement elsewhere, in England became episcopal, royal, and in several senses

[121] *History*, v, pp. 131–2; not found in 1762 or 1754.
[122] *History*, v, p. 211; Hume, 1762, vol. v, p. 184; Forbes, 1970, pp. 319–20.

Catholic. We have come face to face with William Laud and his colleagues, and it is emphasised that while he was an unswerving opponent of papal authority and his political theology transferred all sacred dominion to the king, Laud's desire to restore the *ecclesia anglicana* to the Catholic mainstream caused him to promote all manner of ritual practices which looked irremediably popish to Protestant eyes gazing in the shattered mirror of English Christianity. The destructive energy of enthusiasm was therefore directed against him and all he did; but while his enemies were not wrong in perceiving that his ecclesiology was potentially dangerous to the royal authority, they were slow to understand that their own enthusiasm was a greater threat still. When Charles supported the Arminians with their insistence on his own sacredness, the anti-Arminians supposed that he was being led to betray his own headship of the church, and their fears for the constitution became fears for the Reformation in its English form; enthusiasm slowly turned against the king and even the monarchy. Without all this, Hume thought, there might have been no effective resistance to the prerogative; but without it, that resistance would not have taken the form of civil war. The great miscarriages that led to the drawing of the sword – the Grand Remonstrance, the attempt on the five members, the Militia Ordinance – were miscarriages of state; but what led men to fight victoriously against their king was a perception of the state through the eyes of religious enthusiasm.

It did not follow, of course, that the king's cause was upheld solely by the power of superstition. Hume is attentive to those we call constitutional royalists, who left the parliament to follow the king because they perceived that in the end, the royal authority was necessary to the conduct of both church and state. Enlightenment entailed the subjection of religion to civil society, and in the British kingdoms the maintenance of the monarchy in its Tudor form was the means by which that end must be achieved. The crisis of the seventeenth century could be solved only when new means were found of exercising monarchy in both parliament and Church of England, and these must involve the abandonment of both the enthusiasm of the absolute decrees and the sacralisation of monarchy by the conjunction of Arminian with Catholic beliefs. But it was the inner logic of the Arminian position which must bring this about; and meanwhile there was more to be said for Laudian ritualism than might meet the eye.

> Whatever ridicule, to a philosophic mind, may be thrown on pious ceremonies, it must be confessed, that, during a very religious age, no institutions can be more advantageous to the rude multitude, and tend to mollify that fierce and gloomy spirit of devotion, to which they are subject. Even the English church, though it had retained a share of popish ceremonies, may justly be thought too naked and unadorned, and still to approach too near the abstract and spiritual religion of the puritans.[123] Laud and his associates, by reviving a few primitive institutions of this nature, corrected the error of the first reformers, and presented to the affrighted and astonished mind, some sensible, exterior observances, which might occupy it during its religious exercises, and abate the violence of its disappointed efforts. The thought, no longer bent on that divine and mysterious essence, so superior to the narrow capacities of mankind, was able, by means of the new model of devotion, to relax itself in the contemplation of pictures, postures, vestments, buildings; and all the fine arts, which minister to religion, thereby received additional encouragement. The primate, it is true, conducted this scheme, not with the enlarged sentiments and cool reflection of a legislator, but with the intemperate zeal of a sectary; and by overlooking the circumstances of the times, served rather to enflame that religious fury, which he meant to repress. But this blemish is more to be regarded as a general imputation on the whole age, than any particular failing of Laud's; and it is sufficient for his vindication to observe, that his errors were the most excusable of all those, which prevailed during that zealous period.[124]

The insistence of all enlightened philosophers that the people were irreclaimably superstitious, being led only by their senses, had, we are beginning to see, an element of wish-fulfilment about it. There was such a thing as popular enthusiasm, and the streets of Alexandria, Constantinople, Münster, London and Edinburgh had often enough been filled with angry crowds of unlearned zealots who knew what they thought they believed. Such were the effects of the conversion of religion from polytheist cult to monotheist theology, and though a reversion to purely cultic religion could not be achieved – there could be no rebirth of modern paganism – the opium of the people was an antidote to the lysergic acids of enthusiasm. The latter, by eating out the skeleton of priestcraft, were supposed to further civil liberty; but if the latter in fact entailed the circulation and consumption of ritual religion, the neoclassical was not far from the baroque and the rococo, and enlightenment could effect its own alliance with superstition. It can be shown how thoughts of this kind were to affect Gibbon's view of the papacy.[125] Meanwhile, the tragedy of Archbishop Laud and his contemporaries

[123] Hume is not telling us what he thinks of the Scottish church, 'the auld kirk, the cauld kirk, the kirk wi'oot the steeple', where no ceremonial alternative was available.
[124] *History*, vv, pp. 459–60; Hume, 1762, vol. v, pp. 389–90; Forbes, 1970, p. 590.
[125] Womersley, I, pp. lvii–lix, lxxxiii-lxxxiv, ciii-civ; Pocock, 1990b, pp. 357–60.

was that they had found themselves in a culture too deeply fragmented for such alignments to be possible.

This is peculiarly an English story. In Scotland the Kirk had no Catholic component, and the enthusiasm of the clergy was the more barbarous because there were fewer of the disciplines of civil society; while in Ireland there was little history of the Reformation to recount. Hume follows Sir John Davies, that pioneer of British philosophical history, in presenting James I as the legislator who sought to transform Gaelic kinship tenures by substituting English primogeniture and fee simple;[126] but perhaps ironically observes of the Irish rebels of 1641:

> No individual of any sept, according to the ancient customs, had the property of any particular estate; but as the whole sept had a title to a whole territory, they ignorantly preferred this barbarous community before the more secure and narrower possessions assigned them by the English,[127]

and the image of tribal barbarism is sustained by Hume's firm acceptance of Sir John Temple's account of the scale and ferocity of the massacres carried out in 1641 on English and Scottish settlers.[128] But the dominant narrative is that of English politics, for the reason that the greater complexity of government in church and state generates a narrative of comparable complexity and significance. This is a narrative of actions and miscarriages of state, to which the narrative of changes in religion, opinion, manners, commerce and culture serves as context and deep background; but the mysteries of human action, the theme of Thucydidean and Tacitist historiography, are deepened by the inclusion of both the mysteries of religion and the mysteries of the religious mind. Hume repeatedly insists

> that the religious spirit, when it mingles with faction, contains in it something supernatural and unaccountable; and that, in its operations upon society, effects correspond less to their known causes than is found in any other circumstance of government,[129]

so that in the reign of Charles I,

> the spirit of enthusiasm, being universally diffused, disappointed all the views of human prudence, and disturbed the operation of every motive, which usually influences society.[130]

[126] *History*, v, pp. 46–9. For Davies see Pawlisch, 1985; Pocock, 1987, ch. III.
[127] *History*, v, p. 338; Hume, 1762, vol. v, p. 287; Forbes, 1970, p. 455.
[128] Temple, 1646; *History*, v, pp. 335–45.
[129] *History*, v, p. 67; Hume, 1762, vol. v, pp. 55–6; Forbes, 1970, p. 144.
[130] *History*, v, p. 221; Hume, 1762, vol. v, p. 191; Forbes, 1970, p. 329.

We have left behind the *arcana imperii*, and embarked upon the *arcana spiritus*. This unpredictability, with which the historian must contend, is not, in Hume's mind, simply the consequence of the essential absurdity of all religious belief; it comes about because the intelligence maximises its own imaginings to infinity, and then feeds upon them to the point of self-destruction. His account of enthusiasm parallels Thucydides's account of what happens in time of civil war, when words first change and then lose their meanings; but, precisely because the experience is total, it is short-lived and self-consuming. As we move through civil war and regicide – which concludes the first volume of the *History of Great Britain* – into the years of the interregnum, the narrative is that of the explosion, followed by the extinction, of enthusiasm. Hume knows something of antinomianism, of how the personality which believes it has totally internalised the divine can think itself set free from civil and moral laws,[131] and how this spirit came over the Army in 1647–9; but not much about the politics of 'the world turned upside down'.[132] He can retell the strange and rather moving story of the soldiers who appeared in a Surrey churchyard, intending to burn the documents enjoining sabbath observance, tithe payment, spiritual and secular magistracy, and lastly the Bible itself, in affirmation of the spirit's absolute freedom, but found the wind so high it blew their candles out.[133] The full story of such manifestations, however, could not be told until scholars had explored the great collections of seventeenth-century pamphlets, as they had scarcely begun to do; and Hume's narrative focuses on the arresting personalities of Vane, Harrison and above all Cromwell, the most dangerous of hypocrites because he was utterly sincere at every moment, having wholly deceived himself and thus released in his own conduct the energies of a great prince as well as a great captain. By the time of his death all enthusiasm is burnt out, and England relapses into Restoration as if as little as possible should have happened. Such is the paradox of his life and achievement.

The second volume of the *History of Great Britain* – the last of the *History of England* – is principally a narrative history of the years from 1649 to 1689. It has – and the same may be said of most twentieth-century treatments of its period – little 'philosophical' structure, meaning that it does not recount major changes in the structure of English society or the mentality of English culture; we may even feel that Hume does not take

[131] *History*, vol. v, pp. 493–4; vi, p.4. [132] Christopher Hill, 1975.
[133] *History*, vi, pp. 546–7 (note A); Hume, 1762, vol. v, pp. 8–9, note. The source is Clement Walker's *History of Independency*. Forbes's edition stops at the execution of the king.

up opportunities to develop those that were available to him. He knows that the Restoration Church of England was not the Laudian church, and that the Dissenters were not identical with the puritans; but he does not pursue the themes of latitudinarianism in the former or Arianism in the latter, which would have enabled him to follow the beginnings of an English enlightenment. George Fox and the Quakers make their appearance, and serve as the paradigm case of the self-secularisation of enthusiasm;[134] but they are marginal to the narration of high politics – especially since William Penn does not appear as an actor – and deism is mentioned only in a court setting, as the probable belief of Charles II or the Earl of Shaftesbury.[135] The narrative does not make its way through patterns of historic transformation, and is therefore a narrative of *arcana imperii*, as might be expected from a post-revolutionary era in which the great conflicting mentalities are mostly exhausted. Restoration politics derive their peculiar ugliness from this vacuum; men of very few principles look with sullen fear and hatred on the actions of those, equally unprincipled, whose principles might be said to differ from their own, and instead of the fires of enthusiasm we have the paranoia of the Popish Plot. There is a sense, however, in which this world of Tacitean *arcana* and Hobbesian diffidence is more real, and certainly more political, than that of the conflicting fantasies of superstition and enthusiasm. From the moment when James duke of York 'openly declared his conversion to Rome', all was changed.

> Unaccountable terrors of popery, ever since the accession of the house of Stuart, had prevailed throughout the nation; but these had formerly been found so groundless, and had been employed to so many bad purposes, that surmises of this nature were likely to meet with the less credit among all men of sense; and nothing but the duke's imprudent bigotry could have convinced the whole nation of this change of religion. Popery, which had hitherto been only a hideous spectre, was now become a real ground of terror; being openly and zealously embraced by the heir to the crown, a prince of industry and enterprize; while the king himself was not entirely free from like suspicions.[136]

It is not that fear has become more rational, so much as more public and political; we are back with reason of state, located in a public domain where the question is how much fear and insecurity the prince may inflict upon his subjects. And the royal brothers are acting in the *siècle de Louis XIV*, an era which even the strongly francophile David

[134] *History*, VI, pp. 142–6.
[135] *History*, VI, pp. 185, 241, 539–40. These remarks are echoed and may have been adopted by Voltaire; above, p. 143–5. [136] *History*, VI, p. 251; Hume, 1762, vol. VI, p. 209.

Hume saw less in terms of the enlightenment of Europe by the solar radiation of neo-classical kingship than the terrorisation of Europe by the encroaching threat of universal monarchy. It was in the world after Utrecht that Hume saw absolute monarchies, constitutional monarchies and republics as capable of existing together and contributing to a common European culture, and the fear of universal monarchy as itself as 'only a hideous spectre'.[137] When he considered Louis XIV as he had been at the gates of Utrecht, Luxemburg and Strasburg, Hume was in no doubt that it had been 'a real ground of terror'.[138]

The Catholicism of France was Gallican rather than Austro-Spanish, and there are moments when 'popery' hardly seems the word for it; but it dominated English politics for nearly two decades, both on account of the preponderance of France in the post-Westphalia European states system, and on account of the uncertainties of the English succession in combination with the instability of the English crown's position at the head of both the parliamentary kingdom and the established church. Out of these complex interactions, and the grim, confused and murderous politics to which they gave rise, Hume traces the emergence of the Whig and Tory parties, which preoccupied him as they did his contemporaries by posing the problem of whether they persisted as continuing differences of principle and confession, or merely as durable enmities based on fantasy. Whatever the answer, they took shape in Restoration England and Scotland because, in the midst of the legacies of civil war and the rapidly changing politics of Europe, the old problem of royal prerogative and parliamentary privilege, the consequence of the disintegration of the medieval 'ancient constitution', remained unsolved. Hume did not carry his history, whether in 1756 or in his last revisions down to 1776, past the point where it was solved; past 1688–9, where James II, pursuing his catholicising policies, pushed the prerogative so far as to claim the dispensing power, and the combination of European politics with the question of the English succession brought about his expulsion. Of the revolution as a climacteric in English history Hume has this to say:

> Thus have we seen, through the course of four reigns, a continual struggle maintained between the crown and the people: Privilege and prerogative were ever at variance: And both parties, beside the present object of dispute, had many latent claims, which, on a favourable occasion, they produced against their adversaries. Governments too steady and uniform, as they are seldom

[137] Miller, 'Of the Balance of Power', esp. p. 339. See Robertson, 1993a, pp. 349–73.
[138] *History*, VI, pp. 216–18, 265, 298–9, 320, 444.

free, so are they, in the judgment of some, attended with another sensible inconvenience: They abate the active powers of men; depress courage, invention, and genius; and produce an universal lethargy in the people. Though this opinion may be just, the fluctuation and contest, it must be allowed, of the English government were, during these reigns, much too violent both for the repose and safety of the people. Foreign affairs, at that time, were either entirely neglected, or managed to pernicious purposes: And in the domestic administration there was felt a continued fever, either secret or manifest; sometimes the most furious convulsions and disorders. The revolution forms a new epoch in the constitution; and was probably attended with consequences more advantageous to the people, than barely freeing them from an exceptionable administration. By deciding many important questions in favour of liberty, and still more, by that great precedent of deposing one king, and establishing a new family, it gave such an ascendant to popular principles, as has put the nature of the constitution beyond all controversy. And it may justly be affirmed, without any danger of exaggeration, that we, in this island, have ever since enjoyed, if not the best system of government, at least the most entire system of liberty, that ever was known amongst mankind.[139]

But this ringing conclusion is carefully self-muting. We know from the *Essays* that liberty is only half the story; that any government must be made up of a precarious and imperfect balance between liberty and authority; and to tell us that in 1688–9 privilege and the republican component gained ground, while prerogative and the absolutist component lost it, is to tell us only about the 'system of liberty' and not about the 'system of government'. The 'new epoch in the constitution' cannot arrive until authority has found the means of emerging from the barren struggles of the seventeenth century; and in both the *Essays* and the *History*, Hume has repeatedly told us what these means were. They consisted in the elaboration of a system of patronage and office – carefully distinguished from a system of bribes and pensions[140] – by which the crown could influence the conduct of members of parliament and attach them to its interest. They consisted, in short, of that system of Walpolean government under which Hume had begun writing the *Essays*; which patriots in opposition and convinced republicans incessantly denounced as corruption; the denunciation of which provides the driving force of Catharine Macaulay's histories; which led Thomas Jefferson, fresh from the struggle with Alexander Hamilton's attempt to create a presidential interest in Congress, to consider Hume's *History* a most dangerous counter-manifesto to the Constitution of the United

[139] *History*, VI, pp. 530–1; Hume, 1762, vol. VI, p. 441. Cf. *History*, VI, pp. 475–6.
[140] Miller, pp. 44–6, 49–50, 51–3, 276–7; *History*, V, pp. 58, 271; VI, pp. 234, 407, 317n., 366, 532–3.

States.[141] By Hume's time it was already a commonplace that the Revolution had replaced the royal prerogative with the more informal and insidious 'influence of the crown', and in Hume's judgment that was exactly what it should have done. But the history of this achievement could not be written if one decided to stop short in 1689, and Hume and all his readers knew this perfectly well. The history of both England and Great Britain would have to be carried on at least to 1714, through the great wars in which William III had involved his new kingdoms and which, terminating the threat of universal monarchy in Europe, had made possible the government of a unified Britain by the new devices of standing army, public credit and parliamentary interest. It would be a philosophical history, a history of the replacement of conquest by commerce, and a history of enlightenment – that is, of whatever had, if anything had, replaced the oscillation of religion between the extremes of enthusiasm and superstition. All these themes, and many supporting them, were well known to Hume and had been daringly and minutely analysed in his *Essays*. But he did not write the narrative history to which they should provide the philosophical matrix. Instead of going past 1689, he turned back to the preconditions of 1603.

[141] Stourzh, 1970; Walton, 1976; Banning, 1978, pp. 132–4; Pocock, 1985, pp. 140–1.

CHAPTER 14

England under the House of Tudor: *monarchy, Europe and enthusiasm*

As Hume advances into the more distant past, the character of his philosophical generalisations changes; they are decreasingly those which establish the conditions of existence of a modern society. There is a change also in the narrative of men's deeds and the ways in which it is related to the disquisitions which expound the conditions under which the deeds are performed; for the less integrated the society, the less are the *arcana* those of an *imperium* and the closer they draw to the incoherent actions and manners of barbarians who have no state. The less likely, too, is it that such actions will be worth recording or will find historians capable of recording them; we approach the nadir of savage warchiefs whose historians are monks. The year 1485, however, at which *The History of England under the House of Tudor* begins, is a long way from that low point. Henry VII is still a late medieval figure, of whom Hume has no great opinion; but he has Francis Bacon for his historian, who will be followed by Herbert of Cherbury for Henry VIII and William Camden for Elizabeth I, and these are literary models to be taken seriously. Henry VII, furthermore, lived at a turning-point in European history; the end of the fifteenth century, when gunpowder, navigation and the revival of letters put an end to the feudal and scholastic period; and his own legislation against retainers had been credited by Bacon, and still more by Harrington, with a major role in this great transformation. Hume did not think him deserving of this; he saw Henry as enlarging the prerogative more than he had framed statutes, and insisted that commerce had done more than legislation to transform society. There was one major exception:

> the most important law in its consequences, which was enacted during the reign of Henry, was that by which the nobility and gentry acquired a power of breaking the ancient entails, and of alienating their estates. By means of this law, joined to the beginning luxury and refinements of the age, the great fortunes of the barons were gradually dissipated, and the property of the

> commons encreased in England. It is probable, that Henry foresaw and intended this consequence, because the constant scheme of his policy consisted in depressing the great, and exalting churchmen, lawyers, and men of new families, who were more dependent on him.[142]

It is the myth of the Tudor 'new men'; but this legislation has to be viewed in context.

> The encrease of the arts, more effectually than all the severities of law, put an end to this pernicious practice [of livery and maintenance]. The nobility, instead of vying with each other, in the number and boldness of their retainers, acquired by degrees a more civilized species of emulation, and endeavoured to excel in the splendour and elegance of their equipages, houses, and tables. The common people, no longer maintained in vicious idleness by their superiors, were obliged to learn some calling or industry, and became useful both to themselves and to others. And it must be acknowledged, in spite of those who declaim so violently against refinement in the arts, or what they are pleased to call luxury, that, as much as an industrious tradesman is both a better man and a better citizen than one of those idle retainers, who formerly depended on the great families; so much is the life of a modern nobleman more laudable than that of an ancient baron.[143]

Harrington had noted something of the sort, but had thought it undermined the great estates.[144] We are looking here at a continuation of Hume's correspondence with Adam Smith, who saw one origin of agrarian capitalism in the cultural change which had led the great landowners to abandon the maintenance of men for the conspicuous consumption of goods,[145] thus moving from the manor and its tenants to the household and its retainers, and subsequently imposing a productive work-discipline on the servitors even more than the peasants. Hume is studying that transformation of the economy whose effects in the transformation of manners and opinions, he had told Smith in 1752, were not felt until 1603.[146] Such had been his reason for beginning his history at the later date; but he had since consented to go back to 1485 in search of the material origins of the revolution in opinions, and the history of England under the Tudors would be the history of the interval between cause and effect. What would religion and government be like when the foundations of the medieval order had collapsed, but the meanings of this had not yet dawned on men's minds?

[142] *History*, III, p. 77; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 63.
[143] *History*, III, pp. 76–7; Hume, 1762, vol. III. p. 63. [144] Pocock (ed.), 1977, p. 198.
[145] Campbell and Skinner (eds.), 1981, vol. I. pp. 413–14, 418–22. The rise of the household to prominence in the history of English historiography does not appear to have been studied.
[146] Above, p. 202.

One consequence would be that history became a serious object of study.

> Here therefore commences the useful, as well as the more agreeable part of modern annals; certainty has place in all the considerable, and even most of the minute parts of historical narration; a great variety of events, preserved by printing, give the author the power of selecting, as well as adorning, the facts which he relates; and as each incident has a reference to our present manners and situation, instructive lessons occur every moment during the course of the narration. Whoever carries his anxious researches into preceding periods is moved by a curiosity, liberal indeed and commendable; not by any necessity for acquiring knowledge of public affairs, or the arts of civil government.[147]

What the historical intelligence of David Hume would be like, when moved by curiosity but not by practical necessity, his volumes on medieval Britain must inform us and him. Meanwhile it does not follow that the polite historian's attention is focused on actors worthy of his gaze. Henry VII was still a medieval king, carrying on the Hundred Years War against France as a kind of shadow play, when what meaning it had once had was long since evaporated. Henry did not fully appreciate the major changes which had occurred since 1453, when Constantinople had fallen to the Turks and the English had been expelled from France; changes in the European states system not unconnected with its modernisation by gunpowder, printing and navigation. The Kingdom of France was being consolidated by the absorption of great appanages;[148] Charles VIII's invasion of Italy in 1494 had inaugurated a bipolar struggle for hegemony in western Europe, to which notions of the balance of power (that precondition of Enlightenment) became for the first time appropriate.[149]

> The European states on the continent were then hastening fast to the situation, in which they have remained, without any material alteration, for near three centuries; and began to unite themselves into one extensive system of policy, which comprehended the chief powers of Christendom.[150]

Henry VII was not inattentive to 'the general system of Europe',[151] but remained a peripheral and somewhat archaic figure in it; but the long period between the Regent Bedford and William III, during which England had been without effective power in Europe, had also been that in which English politics, with incalculable consequences, took shape without a standing army. In the absence of baronial power, Henry was

[147] *History*, III, pp. 81–2; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 67.
[148] *History*, III, pp. 25–6.
[149] Cf. 'Of the Balance of Power', Miller, pp. 332–41.
[150] *History*, III, p. 24; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 19.
[151] *History*, III, p. 69.

an arbitrary monarch,[152] but his power rested on custom, not on force. It was the permanence of the decay of the baronage, brought about by social change, that made his reign, in which its effects were first felt, a crucial moment in English history.

With the accession of his son, we move into a post-Machiavellian scene in European politics. That author is not cited, but Guicciardini and Sarpi begin to appear among Hume's references.[153] The scene is not that of the decline of the Italian republics and princes, but of the struggle between two 'enormous monarchies', the Valois and Habsburg, for hegemony in an area defined as 'Europe'. English policy is exposed to the reproach that hereditary enmity with France – something Hume was always interested in allaying – prevented the Tudor kings from redressing the balance against Spain and the Empire; and the lesser enmity with Scotland – a realm still barbarous and governed only by the virtues and vices of the warrior[154] – is seen within this context. The Medici Popes, and Roman policy in general, are caught up in the struggle between France and Spain, and this becomes a matter of importance to England when it complicates Henry VIII's quest for an annulment of his marriage with Catherine of Aragon. However, it is the earlier pontificate of Leo X which witnesses the beginnings of the Reformation, considered as a religious revolution and schism, and gives Hume the opportunity for a very remarkable account of the origins of that process. There is a 'digression concerning the ecclesiastical state', which reduces church and sect, superstition and enthusiasm, to a problem in political economy.[155] In any society, we are told, the arts, trades and professions can often, though not always, be supported by the prices which those receiving their benefits are willing to pay for them, and the relation between supply and demand will regulate the whole process. But there are some professions which are 'necessary in a state', but do not supply individuals with commodities for which they are willing to pay, and the public authority must support 'the retainers of those professions'

> either by annexing peculiar honours to the profession, by establishing a long subordination of ranks and a strict dependence, or by some other expedient. The persons, employed in the finances, armies, fleets and magistracy, are instances of this order of men.

[152] *History*, III, pp. 49, 68, 74–5.
[153] *History*, III, pp. 84n ('Father Paul' is Sarpi), 89n, 90n, 95n, 105n.
[154] *History*, III, pp. 24, 117.
[155] *History*, III, pp. 135–42. Cf. Phillipson, 1989, pp. 114–17.

It may naturally be thought, at first sight, that the ecclesiastics belong to the first class, and that their encouragement, as well as that of lawyers and physicians, may safely be entrusted to the liberality of individuals, who are attached to their doctrines, and who find benefit or consolation from their spiritual ministry and assistance.[156]

In the old English country phrase, 'let them as wants parsons pay for them'; it was to be Jefferson's and Madison's solution for the commonwealth of Virginia. Hume, however, pronounces against it, because the 'interested diligence of the clergy . . . in every religion, except the true' – and for the most part even then – 'is highly pernicious', and the public authority finds it almost unvaryingly hostile. The laws governing the natural behaviour of the human mind ensure that there will be systems of religious belief, in varying degrees superstitious or enthusiastic, and combine with the inherent unmeaningfulness and absurdity of all religious propositions to ensure a climate of dispute of which the clergy cannot fail to take advantage.

Each ghostly[157] practitioner, in order to render himself more precious and sacred in the eyes of his retainers,[158] will inspire them with the most violent abhorrence of all other sects, and continually endeavour, by some novelty, to excite the languid devotion of his audience. No regard will be paid to truth, morals, or decency in the doctrines inculcated. Every tenet will be adopted that best suits the disorderly affectations of the human frame.[159] Customers will be drawn to each conventicle by new industry and address in practising on the passions and credulity of the populace. And in the end, the civil magistrate will find, that he has dearly paid for his pretended frugality, in saving a fixed establishment for the priests; and that in reality the most decent and advantageous composition, which he can make with the spiritual guides, is to bribe their indolence, by assigning stated salaries to their profession, and rendering it superfluous for them to be farther active, than merely to prevent their flock from straying in quest of new pastures. And in this manner ecclesiastical establishments, though commonly they arose at first from religious views, prove in the end advantageous to the political interests of society.[160]

We find that religious toleration, in Hume's view, served exactly the same purpose as religious establishment: that of policing and lobotomising religion, by cutting off at source its tendency to disputatiousness,

[156] *History*, III, p. 135; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 117.
[157] Anti-clerical writers were in the habit of using this English version of the word 'spiritual', with the intention of suggesting that the clergy were only conjurers manipulating spooks. It is Hobbes' 'kingdom of darkness' and 'kingdom of fairies'. [158] Another word worth thinking about.
[159] Is there a suggestion that religion is of a material or psychosomatic origin?
[160] *History*, III, p. 136; Hume, 1762, vol. III, pp. 117–18.

before the clergy could claim civil authority and convert ministry into magistracy. Either must be exercised under the control of the civil magistrate, and it was vital that he should believe as little as possible of the religion he protected and reduced to inertia. If Hume had lived to know that Jefferson – whose opinion of the Christian clergy differed little from his own – had adopted the alternative of privatising religion and leaving it to the operations of a free market, and had found himself politically attacked by the clergy and preachers he claimed to be setting free, he would have been neither surprised nor sympathetic; and Jefferson probably knew that this would have been Hume's attitude. The *History* has begun to be a history of established churches subsequent to the Protestant Reformation; but in order to explain that phenomenon, it has next to be laid down that the Roman church, at the outset of the sixteenth century, rested upon an even worse solution to the problem of religious establishment than either so far considered. The church had everywhere obtained enormous riches, and held them on the basis of a claim to independence of and competition with the civil power. In an era of the increasing power and activity of great monarchies, this was a precarious situation, and furnished yet another motive to the church's incessant pursuit of material and spiritual independence. It was, furthermore, an era of rising prices,[161] and

Leo X, by his generous and enterprizing temper, had much exhausted his treasury, and was obliged to employ every invention, which might yield money, in order to support his projects, pleasures and liberalities.[162]

The emphasis is on his need for funds, in pursuit less of his wars and policies in the affairs of the European states, than of his ambition to be a generous prince and patron of the arts.

It is commonly believed, that Leo, from the penetration of his genius, and his familiarity with ancient literature, was fully acquainted with the ridicule and falsity of the doctrines, which as supreme pontiff, he was obliged by his interest to promote: It is the less wonder, therefore, that he employed for his profit those pious funds, which his predecessors, the most ignorant and credulous, had always, under plausible pretences, made use of for their selfish purposes.[163]

The logic of Hume's historical analysis almost requires that it should have been an unbelieving Pope who formulated the doctrine of the treasury of merits and the universal sale of indulgences. Hypocrisy is

[161] *History*, III, pp. 78–9, 155–6. [162] *History*, III, p. 137; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 119.
[163] *History*, III, p. 138; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 119.

inherent in the religious mentality, and a Pope who fanatically believed what he had deluded himself into saying, would have been a greater hypocrite than the enlightened Leo, whose mind, enlarged by the new forces of the age, instructed him in both the falsity of the doctrine and the necessity he was under to promote it. The doctrine of indulgences, and their subsequent distribution everywhere, was the ultimate commodification of redemptive virtue, and called forth the protest of those for whom redemption must be attained by the individual, but perhaps not by any virtue of his own. Luther challenged the entire edifice of papal authority to do these things, and was led in a very few steps to the point where he had located redemption entirely within the experience of the individual, and had unleashed all the energies of enthusiasm. He could not have done what he did without support from the new forces of the age – the printing press to disseminate his words and actions,[164] powerful territorial princes to protect him for their reasons of state[165] (while others attacked him for theirs) – but it was to be a question, variously answered in various circumstances from now on, whether reason of state, or reason of culture, could domesticate the forces Luther had released, in their own way as dangerous to the civil ruler as papalism had been.

As Henry VIII of England became increasingly anxious for an annulment of his marriage, he knew that both reason of state and religious agitation were weakening the position of the papacy in ways he might exploit. He was led in the course of events to the crucial, and as it proved revolutionary, step of declaring that the Pope possessed no jurisdiction in England, and that he himself was supreme head of the church in England in virtue of his exclusive jurisdiction over it; but Hume is clear that Henry did not intend a complete reduction of the spiritual to the secular, or an embrace of the Lutheran confrontation of exclusive secular sovereignty with justification by faith alone. He emphasises Henry's Catholic orthodoxy in all points of doctrine, and adverts at least three times[166] to the certainly arresting circumstance that the king was a keen student and expositor of Thomas Aquinas. There is more here than mere irony. There had been pious kings of England, but never before one who was a sophisticated if amateur theologian and scholastic, and this has to be seen as an effect of the revival of letters, possibly the invention of printing, and the enlargement of reading characteristic of the age. No doubt the reading of ancient authors could be expected to

[164] *History*, III, pp. 140–1. [165] *History*, III, p. 139. [166] *History*, III, pp. 85, 139, 172.

deliver minds (like Pope Leo's) from scholastic disputation and Christian theology; but the scholastics and the Fathers were there to be read also, and Henry's powers as a reader and exegete helped blind him to the intellectual dilemmas which his breach with Rome imposed on his clergy and, increasingly, his laity. He was too confident a theologian – to say nothing of the appalling self-confidence which at all times pervaded his personality[167] – to realise that theological dispute was the principal source of clerical authority and its threat to the civil; or to realise that what he saw as the strictly jurisdictional breach with Rome raised fundamental questions regarding the nature of the church, the nature of salvation, and in the long run the nature of God. There were Lollards and Lutherans, and there would be Protestants, among the subjects of his kingdom who understood all this perfectly well; but Henry remained to the end a firm supporter of the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the sacraments – which he enforced with both disputatious and judicial ferocity[168] – and did not see that it was significant that this doctrine was also the last that his subjects would be willing, but would nevertheless be compelled, to give up.[169]

The relation between the demands of the king and the beliefs of the people is crucial to the story which Hume has to tell, and we need to pay close attention to the way he tells it. He could have told it on the presumption that English popular religion on the eve of the Reformation was principally cultic, an affair of shrines and processions, customs and rituals; 'superstitious' in the sense supposed to be conducive to priestcraft, but – as Hume now saw – to priestcraft mainly in the pagan sense. To this he had no great objection; the priests of antiquity were no threat to the civil order, the cults of antiquity could be patronised by philosophic magistrates, and if the people were irredeemably guided only by their senses, superstition was the religion best calculated to keep them happy. He had already written quite a sympathetic account of Laud's attempt to revive ritual in the next century,[170] and it would have been open to him now to suggest that Henry might have left cultic religion intact under a clergy securely attached to the crown. He points out that the regime had no option but to destroy the cult of Thomas Becket, that embodiment of clerical immunity to royal jurisdiction;[171] but he knows that the rebels of the Pilgrimage of Grace were protesting against the attack on popular religion,[172] and he concedes that many

[167] *History*, III, pp. 84, 129, 193–4, 212–13, 234–5, 321–3. [168] *History*, III, pp. 260–4.
[169] *History*, III, p. 365. [170] Above, p. 210. [171] *History*, III, p. 254.
[172] *History*, III, pp. 244–7.

things – nunneries included – were swept away in the dissolution of the slothful and uneconomic monasteries that might have been left in place.[173] But this is not the tale he most wants to tell. He is clear that the severance of the English church from Rome left many theological questions in urgent need of an answer; and while, in company with the *philosophes*, Hume disapproves of all theological dispute, he is in no doubt that Henry VIII could not avoid engaging in it. As a civil sovereign, he might want it ended; as head of the church, he was obliged to determine it himself; as a confident theologian, he was sure of his ability to do so. The decisions he gave were for the most part conservative in both doctrine and discipline; but the more of these he gave, the more he was obliged to give,[174] less because his decrees aroused opposition than because they led to new questions to which he must furnish the answers. The English Reformation was anything but an occasion for the extinction of Christian disputatiousness.

Parliament and the learned classes were in no hurry to terminate dispute or to query the king's authority. Hume finds in Herbert of Cherbury 'the speech of a gentleman of Gray's Inn', which runs over the history of religious dispute and

> infers, that the only religion obligatory on mankind is the belief of one supreme Being, the author of nature; and the necessity of good morals, in order to obtain his favour and protection. Such sentiments would be deemed latitudinarian, even in our time, and would not be advanced, without some precaution, in a public assembly.[175]

It is remarkable that Hume uses the word 'latitudinarian' instead of 'deist', especially since Herbert was himself among the fathers of English deism (as Hume was not). The point of the story is that such views did not gain ground, if they were advanced at all. Parliament and people shrank from the exciting opportunity of private judgment, and therefore from the opportunity of enthusiasm; conservative themselves, they were content to have the king promulgate their conservatism for them, and had no desire to disturb the peace by going back to the authority of Rome, or on to the authority of the spirit. The state of Europe ensured that he had nothing much to fear from the Pope, or either of the great Catholic sovereigns; the state of England ensured that he had less to fear from any revolt of the nobility. In ruling both his church and his kingdom, therefore, Henry was at once none too secure and absolutely

[173] *History*, III, pp. 252 (nunneries), 269, 368–9. [174] *History*, III, p. 290.
[175] *History*, III, pp. 186–7; Hume, 1762, vol. III, p. 163.

despotic. He was a beneficiary of his age in that the decline of baronial power meant that there was no challenge to his prerogative, in parliament or out of it. That shard of the medieval ancient constitution survived the decay of the other; and the circumstances of his assault on superstition meant that it would be over a century before enthusiasm grew to the point of replacing it as a challenge to royal authority. How that came about, Hume had already informed his readers; in relating the rest of Henry's reign, he need explain only the despotism exercised by the king's extraordinary personality and the absolutism exercised in the political vacuum consequent on the absence of any kind of opposition in parliament. It is noteworthy, however, that Hume is indignant for several pages about the so-called Statute of Proclamations;[176] his belief that there was no true ancient constitution did not prevent his being shocked by unconstitutionality.

This has not been a history of legislation in the classical sense of the foundation of a new law and a new religion. Henry VIII does not intend all of the vast impact of his actions; none of his advisers (not even Thomas Cromwell) is credited with a legislative programme; and Hume's law – the oscillation of the religious mind between superstition and enthusiasm – ensures that the Reformation is not other than a continuation of the long history of Christian dispute. We are in a 'modern' history of unintended consequences, unperceived change and transformation of manners; the 'ancient' dimension persists in the shape of narrative and its conventions, while it is the business of 'philosophic' history to explain how the 'modern' operates. The transformation of manners was beginning in Henry VII's time; without it Henry VIII could not have been what he was or done what he did; but the consequences of transformation and legislation in the time of the first Tudors will not be felt, as the reader has already seen, until enlargement of the mind and a rebirth of enthusiasm bring about a revolution in opinion, and therefore in politics, under the first Stuarts; and whether the consequences of that have been fully appreciated under the first Hanoverians is a question Hume does not propose to address by writing a volume of his *History*. What remains of the *History of England under the House of Tudor* is a history of the interval between Henry VIII's actions and their consequences for James VI and I and Charles I.

After the obsessively dominant figure of Henry comes a long period of monarchical instability; a child king and a succession of women rulers,

[176] *History*, III, pp. 266–7, 299–300, 353.

operating under conditions of acute uncertainty, followed by the further crisis of monarchy between 1628 and 1688. In Edward VI's reign there is the first serious attempt to make the Church of England Protestant, and Hume displays no reluctance to follow such 'Laudian' historians as Peter Heylyn and Jeremy Collier[177] in associating the reduction of the clergy from a priesthood to a ministry with the spoliation of church lands by a greedy nobility and gentry. It was perfectly compatible with his most cynical conception of a religious establishment that the church should enjoy its own endowments under a common law, and it is worth recalling here that Edmund Burke was to echo the high-church complaint that Henry VIII had failed to endow the church with monastic lands, when he turned against the French Revolution because it sought to reduce the clergy to a salariate.[178] With Mary I comes a reaction, though it is found impossible to restore church lands now securely in the grip of the nobles; and the advisers of Cardinal Pole and Bishop Gardiner hold a debate on religious toleration – plainly well within the classical convention of fictionalised speeches – in which the former are made to say:

> Open the door to toleration, mutual hatred relaxes among the sectaries; their attachment to their particular mode of religion decays; the common occupations and pleasures of life succeed to the acrimony of disputation; and the same man, who, in other circumstances, would have braved flames and tortures, is induced to change his sect from the smallest hope of favour and advancement, or even from the frivolous hope of becoming more fashionable in his principles. If any exception can be admitted to this maxim of toleration, it will only be where a theology altogether new, nowise connected with the ancient religion of the state, is imported from foreign countries, and may easily, at one blow, be eradicated, without leaving the seeds of future innovation. But as this exception would imply some apology for the ancient pagan persecutions, or for the extirpation of Christianity in China and Japan;[179] it ought surely, on account of this detested consequence, to be rather buried in eternal silence and oblivion.[180]

Hume is expounding a policy utopian even in his own time, and it is clear that in his mind toleration aimed at the euthanasia of religion; it was not moved by respect, but by contempt,[181] for the diversity of religious belief, and to find a philosophy of toleration which held that all

[177] *History*, III, pp. 335n, 336n, 339n, 340n, 342n, 354n, 355n, 477–8 (note M). Hume also relies on many more Protestant authors.
[178] Pocock (ed.), 1987b, pp. xxxv, 102–3.
[179] Since the Christian rebellion in Japan occurred in 1637, this is an anachronism.
[180] *History*, III, p. 433; cf. VI, p. 322. Hume, 1762, vol. III, pp. 377–8. [181] Mankin, 1996.

ways to God were of value in the sight of the spirit we must look for a mentality very unlike his, which he would probably have considered enthusiasm. Mary of course received no advice at all like this, and the question for Hume as historian is why her persecutions failed, when the English were glad to take their religion from princes, like her father and sister, little less despotic than she was. Perhaps persecution is always counter-productive; perhaps a mentality, Protestant and potentially enthusiastic, was already ineradicably established.

The fourth volume of the *History* – fourth in order of both composition and publication – is devoted to the reign of Elizabeth I. Here the structure is mainly narrative, since there is much spectacular if precarious statecraft to record and some sound neo-classical historians (notably Camden) to follow in reporting it. What renders the narrative unique, of course, is that the protagonist and antagonist are both women rulers – Elizabeth and Mary Stuart, with Mary of Guise and Catherine de Medici as less immediate figures – and Hume has opportunity to write a history of 'the regiment of women'. This he does not consider monstrous at all. It is true that Mary Stuart makes, while Elizabeth narrowly manages to avoid making, all the mistakes which a woman ruler is liable to make on account of her sex: in marrying Darnley, in being privy to his murder, in the lawless and no less disastrous marriage with Bothwell. Hume is a strong, indeed a militant,[182] advocate of Mary's guilt as revealed in the Casket Letters, and in her complicity with some of the plots against Elizabeth; he observes in a note:

> An English Whig, who asserts the reality of the popish plot, an Irish Catholic, who denies the massacre of 1641, and a Scotch Jacobite, who maintains the innocence of queen Mary, must be considered as men beyond the reach of argument or reason, and must be left to their prejudices.[183]

But in assessing Mary's character, he allows her most of the male virtues as well as the female graces; and his last word on her is less sexist still.

> In order to form a just idea of her character, we must set aside one part of her conduct, while she abandoned herself to the guidance of a profligate man; and must consider these faults, whether we admit them to be imprudences or crimes, as the result of an inexplicable, though not uncommon, inconstancy in the human mind, of the frailty of our nature, of the violence of passion, and of the influence, which situations, and sometimes momentary incidents, have on

[182] *History*, IV, pp. 390–5 (notes K, L, M).
[183] *History*, IV, p. 395; Hume, 1762, does not contain this note. It is interesting that of the three, the English Whig is the only one to have vanished altogether from the arena of historiography.

persons, whose principles are not thoroughly confirmed by experience and reflexion.[184]

Hume is endeavouring to consider 'the human mind' and 'the frailty of our nature', in terms as little gender-specific as he can make them. Mary's mistakes are those of a female, but this sentence does not suggest that females are peculiarly prone to mistakes; viewed in the glass of state, they are errors of state and that is what matters. Summing up Elizabeth at the end of her life, he similarly remarks:

> The fame of this princess, though it has surmounted the prejudices both of faction and bigotry, yet lies still exposed to another prejudice, which is more durable because more natural, and which, according to different views in which we survey her, is capable of exalting beyond measure, or diminishing the lustre of her character. This prejudice is founded on the consideration of her sex. When we contemplate her as a woman, we are apt to be struck with the highest admiration of her great qualities and extensive capacity; but we are also apt to require some more softness of disposition, some greater levity of temper, some of those amiable weaknesses by which her sex is distinguished. But the true method of estimating her merit, is to lay aside all these considerations, and consider her merely as a rational being, placed in authority, and entrusted with the government of mankind. We may find it difficult to reconcile our fancy to her as a wife or a mistress; but her qualities as a sovereign, though with some considerable exceptions, are the object of undisputed applause and admiration.[185]

The problem of gender-perception in historical writing is no doubt perennial, but Hume is trying to set it aside. The 'we' for whom he speaks are clearly masculine – the thought of Elizabeth as wife or mistress is indeed one to make the boldest quail – but he is telling them to redirect their thinking. Whether he expects the female readers of whom he is so much aware to share the same scheme of evaluation is less clear – the young Jane Austen could be brought in evidence[186] – but he is resolved to retain the primacy of statecraft as narrative and philosophy as disquisition. The scenes in philosophic history through which the narrative of Elizabeth's statecraft passes are, in the first place, those of the vicissitudes of the European states system, with the threat of Spanish universal monarchy enhanced by religious wars in France and weakened by religious wars in the Netherlands. Hume is conscious of the acute financial insecurity of all the European monarchs which was the paradoxical consequence of the inflow of American bullion, and

[184] *History*, IV, pp. 251–2; Hume, 1762, vol. IV, p. 220.
[185] *History*, IV, pp. 352–3; Hume, 1762, vol. IV, pp. 313–14. [186] Austen, 1993.

looks towards a present in which Britain, France and the Netherlands have evolved a stable competitive capitalism enabling them to conduct a European politics to which Spain and Austria have become marginal. He is not much impressed by the threat of Counter-Reformation – though the Jesuits deserve their place[187] – and remarks of Trent:

> It is the only general council which has been held in an age truly learned and inquisitive; and as the history of it has been written with great learning and judgment, it has tended very much to expose clerical usurpations and intrigues, and may serve us as a specimen of more ancient councils. No one expects to see another general council, till the decay of learning and the progress of ignorance shall again fit mankind for these great impostures[188]

– a truly Humean conclusion, since he did believe that decay and ignorance would return; but he is thinking of Sarpi as a student of history already ancient, whose writings illustrate late antiquity and the patristic period, themselves more worth studying than the revival of baroque Catholicism.

The second scene through which the narrative passes is that of England in the British setting, a philosophical history of the encounters of a quasi-civilised kingdom with others even more barbarous. The Scottish polity is burdened not only with the adventures of Mary Stuart and incessant French and English intervention, but with religious innovators both impolite and enthusiastic – the humanist Buchanan is an odd colleague for the rustic apostle Knox[189] – and a baronial nobility still barbarian in their reliance on armed retainers.[190] The wars in Ireland take us to the frontier between narrative and philosophic history, where a world still more savage than barbarous – Hume cites Edmund Spenser on this point[191] – will absorb its civilised invaders if they do not legislate to change it; the authority here is Sir John Davies, whom we have already met in the seventeenth century.[192] There is little narrative to be written here. Tyrone's actions are performed in the shadowy world of barbarism, while those of Essex have consequence only in the Tacitean history of the English court (the same is true of Raleigh's incursions into Guyana: an unintelligible world, of which he can bring back no truthful report).[193] Only in the next reign will the imposition of common-law tenures make Ireland historically intelligible, and in tropical America

[187] *History*, IV, p. 188; Hume, 1762, vol. IV, p. 161.
[188] *History*, IV, p. 389 (note F); Hume, 1762, vol. IV, p. 541n.
[189] *History*, IV, pp. 41 (Knox), 107 (Buchanan).
[190] *History*, IV, pp. 38, 45, 86–7, 134, 181–2. [191] *History*, IV, p. 312. [192] Above, p. 216.
[193] *History*, IV, p. 296.

the English will not make the experiment at all. The temperate northern colonies form part of the history of civilisation from the time of their settlement.[194]

The narrative intersects more closely with a third 'philosophical' context: that formed by the conjunction of puritanism with parliamentarism. An obvious link here is parliamentary concern with the great matter of the queen's marriage and succession, and the anxieties about the future of the church to which it gave rise. Hume, however, is primarily interested in depicting enthusiasm as an independent and illimitable force, operating without reference to civil and rational considerations. Though he remarks that Knox[195] and the English Marian exiles[196] had been in contact with Calvin, he does not say that they brought back the absolute decrees of grace, so much mentioned in his *History of Great Britain*. He represents them simply as enthusiasts, fired by zeal to an unqualified enmity to all ritual and ceremony, and therefore to the forms of authority which upheld ritual and were upheld by it. Elizabeth,

> who seems to have entertained some propensity, during her whole life, to the catholic superstition, at least to the ancient ceremonies,[197]

established or re-established a church which Hume can praise because it restored ancient ceremonies while placing the clergy who administered them securely under civil authority.

> The fabric of the secular hierarchy [i.e., the bishops] was maintained entire: The ancient liturgy was preserved, so far as thought consistent with the new principles: Many ceremonies, become venerable from age and precedent use, were retained: The splendour of the Romish worship, though removed, had at least given place to order and decency: The distinctive habits of the clergy, according to their different ranks, were continued: No innovation was admitted merely from spite and opposition to former usage: And the new religion, by mitigating the genius of the ancient superstition, and rendering it more compatible with the peace and interests of society, had preserved itself in that happy medium, which wise men have always sought, and which the people have so seldom been able to maintain.[198]

This idealised account of the Elizabethan church rests as much on the high-church historian Peter Heylyn as on the low-church (and Scottish) Gilbert Burnet.[199] Conservative enlightenment has formed its own version of high-church erastianism; given that the clergy do not claim

[194] *History*, v, pp. 146–7. [195] *History*, iv, p. 22. [196] *History*, iv, p. 122.
[197] *History*, iv, p. 291; Hume 1762, iv, p. 257.
[198] *History*, iv, pp. 119–20; Hume, 1762, vol. iv, p. 103. [199] *History*, iv, 120n.

authority independent of the state, a ceremonial and cultic Christianity may keep the people happy in that superstition which is natural to them, but which they may not by themselves be able to maintain. The difficulty remains that Christianity rests on theology, theology entails dispute, and dispute opens the door to both clerical authority and enthusiasm. In Scotland, where there has been no episcopal settlement, the ministers claim authority and the people become prey to gloomy enthusiasm; in England, the returning exiles explode the gunpowder of enthusiasm against the surviving 'genius of the ancient superstition'.

> All enthusiasts, indulging themselves in rapturous flights, extasies, visions, inspirations, have a natural aversion to episcopal authority, to ceremonies, rites and forms, which they denominate superstition, or beggarly elements, and which seem to restrain the liberal effusions of their zeal and devotion: But there was another set of opinions adopted by these innovators, which rendered them in a peculiar manner the object of Elizabeth's aversion. The same bold and daring spirit, which accompanied them in their addresses to the divinity, appeared in their political speculations; and the principles of civil liberty, which, during some reigns, had been little avowed in the nation, and which were totally incompatible with the present exorbitant prerogative, had been strongly adopted by this new sect. Scarcely any sovereign before Elizabeth, and none after her, carried higher, both in speculation and practice, the authority of the crown; and the puritans (so these sectaries were called, on account of their pretending to a superior purity of worship and discipline) could not recommend themselves worse to her favour, than by inculcating the doctrine of resisting or restraining princes . . .
>
> We have thought proper to insert in this place an account of the rise and genius of the puritans; because Camden marks the present year [1568] as the period when they began to make themselves considerable in England. We now return to our narration.[200]

As Hume's combination of philosophical digression with an almost annalistic narrative proceeds, we do not hear more about puritan adoption of resistance theory. The emphasis falls instead on their behaviour in parliament, where they combined outspokenness on dynastic and ecclesiastical issues with zealous assertions of parliamentary privilege, unheard from any other source. The great change of opinion, which was to match privilege against prerogative in the collapse of the ancient constitution, begins here.

> So absolute, indeed, was the authority of the crown, that the precious spark of liberty had been kindled, and was preserved, by the puritans alone; and it was to this sect, whose principles appear so frivolous and habits so ridiculous, that

[200] *History*, iv, pp. 123–4; Hume, 1762, vol. iv, pp. 106–7.

the English owe the whole freedom of their constitution. Actuated by that zeal which belongs to innovators, and by the courage which enthusiasm inspires, they hazarded the utmost indignation of their sovereign; and employing all their industry to be elected into parliament; a matter not difficult, while a seat was rather regarded as a burthen than an advantage; they first acquired a majority in that assembly, and then obtained an ascendant over the church and monarchy.[201]

Hume was expounding a view of Elizabethan parliamentary history which remained ascendant through the lifetime of the late Sir John Neale.[202] He was aided in this by the work of the seventeenth-century antiquary Sir Simonds D'Ewes,[203] who had collected parliamentary journals and diaries of the Elizabethan period. These materials could be used, as they were by Hume, to tell two contrapuntal stories; on the one hand, there were the speeches of the outspoken Peter Wentworth, who had said what he thought about the policies and actions of councillors and the queen herself, and claimed a parliamentary liberty to do so; on the other, there was the language of Elizabeth to her parliaments, commanding them to silence and claiming an uncheckable prerogative, coupled with the language of parliament in reply, acknowledging her authority as sacred and expressing an entire submissiveness in word and action.[204] Hume used this duality to present an image of the freedom and daring possible to enthusiasts alone, confronted with an era in which, the power of the magnates having collapsed, the prerogative which was one half of the medieval constitution was balanced by no opposing principle, so that Elizabeth's subjects, like Henry VIII's before them, freely acknowledged a royal authority so absolute as to be despotic. There was a paradox here, the paradox of voluntary servitude and (Hume intimated) the continuing sovereignty of opinion; the subjects declared the prince absolute, because as yet they knew no alternative, and puritan enthusiasm could supply them with none which was stable, until it burned itself out and was replaced by opinion. Rebellion, regicide and interregnum must intervene, and Hume had already told that story.

He repudiated the whig historians of his time, because they maintained that an ancient constitution had always been in place; but was himself a whig historian, in the sense that he held English history to be the history of the coming to be of that constitution. In concluding his volume on the reign of Elizabeth, Hume made these paradoxes the

[201] *History*, iv, pp. 145–6; Hume, 1762, iv, pp. 125–6. [202] Neale, 1953–7.
[203] D'Ewes, 1693. [204] *History*, iv, pp. 138–46, 178–81, 285–9, 344–8.

centre of his interpretation. On the one hand, he pronounced, not without a certain impishness:

The government of England during that age, however different in other particulars, bore, in this respect, some resemblance to that of Turkey at present: The sovereign possessed every power, except that of imposing taxes: And in both countries this limitation, unsupported by other privileges, appears rather prejudicial to the people. In Turkey, it obliges the Sultan to permit the extortion of the bashas and governors of provinces, from whom he afterwards squeezes presents or takes forfeitures: In England, it engaged the queen to erect monopolies, and grant patents for exclusive trade: An invention so pernicious that, had she gone on, during a track of years, at her own rate, England, the seat of riches, and arts, and commerce, would have contained at present as little industry as Morocco, or the coast of Barbary.[205]

It is the shock value of suggesting that English government can be compared to Turkish that Hume is enjoying; but there is a latent constitutionalism here. Elizabeth does not possess the power of raising taxes, and her resort to monopolies implies the admission that she cannot tax without consent of parliament; it was a greater error in her successors to suppose that they could. Moreover, it was the mark of a true 'oriental despotism' that the subject possessed no free tenure, no property in his goods, and no law to protect either; and unless Hume is abandoning this doctrine – it came under attack a few years later – and conceding like Voltaire that the Turkish ruler's will is controlled by custom if not by law, his analogy must be merely playful. A few pages later, we read this:

The utmost that can be said in favour of the government of that age (and perhaps it may be said with truth) is, that the power of the prince, though really unlimited, was exercised after the European manner, and entered not into every part of the administration; that the instances of a high exerted prerogative were not so frequent as to render property sensibly insecure, or reduce the people to a total servitude . . . that as the prince commanded no mercenary army, there was a tacit check on him [*sic*], which maintained the government in that medium, to which the people had been accustomed; and that this situation of England, though seemingly it approached nearer, was in reality more remote from a despotic and eastern monarchy, than the present government of that kingdom, where the people, though guarded by multiplied laws, are totally naked, defenceless, and disarmed, and besides, are not secured by any middle power, or independent powerful nobility, interposed between them and the monarch.[206]

[205] *History*, iv, pp. 360–1; Hume, 1762, vol. iv, p. 319.
[206] *History*, iv, p. 370; Hume, 1762, vol. iv, pp. 326–7.

Hume's withdrawal from the analogy between Tudor and Ottoman has a sting in its tail. He is making a Montesquieuan point about the nobility,[207] and there is an implied admission that the surrender of arms to a government possessed of a standing army is not free from dangers; even David Hume, we observe, is not absolutely sure that a well-regulated militia is not necessary to the security of a free state. But these lines are part of the criticism of the Hanoverian monarchy, as it stood after 1688, 1714 and 1760, an era to which Hume never extended his *History of England*. As that history advanced, it became more and more involved in the constitutional problem. The Tudor volumes had returned Hume to his starting point, to the problem why parliaments willing to be bullied by Elizabeth were not willing to be lectured by James; and the sociology of knowledge, by which he traced and explained the transformation of manners and the growth of new opinions, did not free him from the recognition that all this went on in a context formed by ancient, fragmented but still powerful institutions. He opened his general verdict on this reign by remarking:

> In order to understand the ancient constitution of England, there is not a period which deserves more to be studied than the reign of Elizabeth,

and enlarged this in a footnote by saying:

> By the ancient constitution, is here meant that which prevailed before the settlement of our present plan of liberty. There was a more ancient constitution, where, though the people had perhaps less liberty than under the Tudors, yet the king had also less authority. The power of the barons was a great check upon him, and exercised great tyranny over them. But there was still a more ancient constitution, viz. that before the signing of the charters, when neither the people nor the barons had any regular privileges; and the power of the government, during the reign of an able prince, was almost wholly in the king. The English constitution, like all others, has been in a state of continual fluctuation.[208]

But this historisation of the ancient constitution did not make it disappear. Hume had now completed his modern history of England, and found it to be the history of a people distracted by the decay of their medieval institutions. Their medieval history would have to be written, and it was not clear that this could be done merely out of curiosity or the search for amusement.

[207] Cohler, 1989, pp. 18–19 (book II, ch. 4), 118–19 (book VIII, ch. 9), 330 (book XIX, ch. 27).
[208] *History*, IV, p. 355 and n; Hume, 1762, vol. IV, pp. 314–15 and n.

CHAPTER 15

Hume's History of England: *the Enlightened narrative in retrospect*

The two volumes which concluded the writing of the *History of England* were published in 1762 as the first and second volumes of its complete edition. They begin in pre-Roman antiquity and end in 1485, where the Tudor volumes began. There can be no narrative of actions in an illiterate culture without historians, and Hume was not much interested in applying speculative stadial theory to the growth of primeval society. He indeed tells us that

> the south-east parts . . . of Britain had already, before the age of Caesar, made the first and most requisite step toward a civil settlement; and the Britons, by tillage and agriculture, had there encreased to a great multitude. The other inhabitants of the island still maintained themselves by pasture,[209]

and lived in a state close to savagery; but he does not follow his English Jacobite precursor Thomas Carte in supplying quite a complex political narrative of the dealings between the Romans, the agricultural Belgae, and the pastoral clans beyond the ploughlands.[210] With the departure of the Romans, the 'Scots' appear, and it has to be decided whether they were originally Irish; Hume's solution is that Ireland was probably settled from north-west Britain, but that the 'Scots' of the fifth century were raiders from Ireland; both theses explain the similarities between Irish and Highland Gaelic.[211] He finds it necessary to deal with this question, which the Ossian controversy was restoring to salience, but does not think it important. His work is by now entirely a history of the English kingdoms, and that established in Lothian appears in the first place an extension of the Anglo-Saxon principality of Northumbria.[212] There is a good case for holding that the Scots kingdom was never an appendage of the unified crown of England,[213] but why it acquired the name 'Scotland' at all is a problem Hume does not consider. The history

[209] *History*, I, pp. 4–5; Hume, 1762, I, p. 2. [210] Carte, 1747, vol. I. [211] *History*, I, p. 12.
[212] *History*, I, p. 23. [213] *History*, II, pp. 87–9.

of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, including that of Malcolm Canmore, is a history essentially Germanic:

> Of all the barbarous nations, known either in ancient or modern times, the Germans seem to have been the most distinguished both by their manners and political institutions, and to have carried to the highest pitch the virtues of valour and love of liberty; the only virtues which can have place among an uncivilized people, where justice and humanity are commonly neglected.[214]

It is important not to be misled into a search for the origins of German racialism. What Hume is saying here could in principle be said of any 'barbarous' people, and the point is that liberty is itself a barbarian characteristic: the fierce and ungovernable independence of peoples not yet rendered sociable or civil. The Germans may have carried this characteristic further than others; or their uniqueness may have consisted in their having somehow established institutions – military, proto-political, tenurial – which permitted their independence to become itself a foundation of civility, in contradistinction to so many other peoples for whom to be 'civilised' was at the same time to be 'corrupted' by luxury and despotism (we shall find that 'civilised and corrupted' was a favourite pair of terms with Gibbon). The problem is that of law; did the Germanic settlers of western Europe establish land tenures 'free' in the sense that they must be regulated and protected by law, thus establishing the security of property necessary to the growth of commerce? Hume had to consider this possibility, in the teeth of his conviction that civil (as opposed to barbarous) liberty was possible only when civil authority had facilitated the exchange of goods, the enlargement of minds and the growth of manners. He had already depicted the turbulent history of modern England as the result of the encounter between the process of civilisation and an unstable mixture of barbarous authority and barbarous liberty. To that extent his medieval history was already pre-determined; but he had to account for the power of its survival in modernity.

He therefore remained preoccupied by the problem of the ancient constitution. Law was the meeting-point of barbarism and civility, occurring under conditions themselves barbarous. Of the English culture-hero Alfred of Wessex we hear much about his encouragement of letters, commerce and the improvement of manners;[215] but the central encomium remains:

[214] *History*, I, p. 15; Hume, 1762, vol. I, p. 11. [215] *History*, I, pp. 63–4, 75–81.

> The better to guide the magistrates in the administration of justice, Alfred framed a body of laws; which, though now lost, served long as the basis of English jurisprudence, and is generally deemed the origin of what is denominated the COMMON LAW. He appointed regular meetings of the states of England twice a year in London; a city which he himself had repaired and beautified, and which he thus rendered the capital of the kingdom. The similarity of these institutions to the customs of the ancient Germans, to the practice of the other northern conquerors, and to the Saxon laws during the Heptarchy, prevents us from regarding Alfred as the sole author of this plan of government; and leads us rather to think, that, like a wise man, he contented himself with reforming, extending, and executing the institutions, which he found previously established.[216]

These ancient 'common customs of the whole realm' are to be subjected to all manner of clerical and feudal deformations. There are to be dangerous monastic incursions under Alfred's successors, effected by the sinister and fraudulent figure of Dunstan.[217] William the Conqueror is to import the whole body of the Norman-Lombard feudal law and to reduce the native English to a serfdom not much removed from slavery;[218] and he is to do so as the ally, but by no means the instrument,[219] of Pope Gregory VII, intent on removing the clergy altogether from the civil order by the imposition of celibacy[220] and on throwing 'Europe, especially Italy and Germany . . . into the most violent convulsions' by seizing the power of investment to clerical dignities out of lay hands.[221] The history of barbarism has become the history of religion; and the history of English barbarism, hitherto forming a world within itself, entirely separated from the rest of Europe,[222] is annexed by the Normans and Angevins to the history of the Latin papacy and the great feudal kingdoms and appanages, the struggle between clerical, kingly and baronial authority. Henry II, a successor to Alfred in the role of English legislator, holds England (and begins to hold Ireland) as one of a chain of dominions in the possession of the house of Anjou, and comes to his own Canossa at the climax of the struggle with Thomas Becket, the greatest English upholder of clerical immunity from royal jurisdiction. Hume is fascinated by both personalities, because the secrets of the heart and the *arcana* of political action have now to be understood wholly within the intricacies of the conflict between kingship and churchmanship. His last word on the martyr of Canterbury is:

[216] *History*, I, pp. 78–9; Hume, 1762, vol. I, p. 66. [217] *History*, I, pp. 90, 92, 95–6, 104–5.
[218] *History*, I, pp. 226–7. This passage attacks the ancient-constitutionalist denial that William ruled as a conqueror. [219] *History*, I, pp. 216–17. [220] *History*, I, pp. 91, 93, 217–18.
[221] *History*, I, pp. 214–16; cf. pp. 264–6. [222] *History*, I, p. 151.

But no man, who enters into the genius of that age, can reasonably doubt of this prelate's sincerity. The spirit of superstition was so prevalent, that it infallibly caught every careless reasoner, much more every one whose interest, and honour, and ambition, were engaged to support it . . . those who preserved themselves untainted by the general contagion, proceeded on no principles which they could pretend to justify: They were more indebted to their total want of instruction, than to their knowledge, if they still retained some share of understanding: Folly was possessed of all the schools as well as all the churches; and her votaries assumed that garb of philosophers together with the ensigns of spiritual dignitaries. Throughout the large collection of letters, which bears the name of St Thomas, we find, in all the retainers of that aspiring prelate, no less than in himself, a most entire and absolute conviction of the reason and piety of their own party, and a disdain of their antagonists: Nor is there less cant and grimace in their stile, when they address each other, than when they compose manifestos for the perusal of the public. The spirit of revenge, violence, and ambition, which accompanied their conduct, instead of forming a presumption of hypocrisy, are the surest pledges of their sincere attachment to a cause, which so much flattered these domineering passions.[223]

Becket is not what Hume said Oliver Cromwell was: a hypocrite more complete because he deceived even himself. Perhaps that role is reserved for the self-isolating enthusiast; superstition is less conducive to hypocrisy because it pervades the culture rather than the personality. But it is still a dogma with Hume that the scholastic intellect concerns itself with propositions that mean absolutely nothing at all, and therefore he is deeply concerned with the powerful mind's capacity to delude itself with absurdity, but does not consider the possibility that Becket and his 'retainers' understood the language in which they wrote to one another, and could apply it to stating and addressing the problems of their own world. Giannone was perhaps a shade closer to comprehending this; whether Gibbon was remains to be seen.

Under the sons of Henry II, we approach the crisis of 1215, and the prelate Stephen Langton is said to deserve our gratitude, whatever his motives, for producing the charter of Henry I on which the Great Charter is founded.[224] Magna Carta forms the climax of the first volume, and of Anglo-Norman history, because the feudal monopoly of arms endowed the barons with some sense of natural liberty.

These were the principal articles, calculated for the interest of the barons; and had the charter contained nothing farther, national happiness and liberty had been very little promoted by it . . . But the barons, who alone drew and imposed on the prince this memorable charter, were necessitated to insert in it other

[223] *History*, I, pp. 333–4; Hume, 1762, vol. I, pp. 294–5. [224] *History*, I, p. 438.

clauses of a more extensive and beneficent nature: They could not expect the concurrence of the people, without comprehending, together with their own, the interests of inferior ranks of men . . . the former articles of the Great Charter contain such mitigations and explanations of the feudal law as are reasonable and equitable . . . the latter involve all the chief outlines of a legal government, and provide for the equal distribution of justice, and free enjoyment of property; the great objects for which political society was at first founded by men, which the people have a perpetual and unalienable right to recal, and which no time, nor precedent, nor statute, nor positive institution, ought to deter them from keeping ever uppermost in their thoughts and attention . . . We may now, from the tenor of this charter, conjecture what those laws were of King Edward, which the English nation, during so many generations, still desired, with such an obstinate perseverance, to have recalled and established. They were chiefly these latter articles of *Magna Charta*; and the barons, who, at the beginning of these commotions, demanded the revival of the Saxon laws, undoubtedly thought, that they had sufficiently satisfied the people, by procuring them this concession, which comprehended the principal objects, to which they had so long aspired.[225]

Hume could whig it with the best, philosopher though he was, and mistaken though he would have thought us if we supposed him indebted to Locke for any of the above language. He is saying that a body of natural equity is to be found at the bottom of even feudal and barbaric law, and even a respect for property if the law should be German or Saxon; we have lost sight of the proposition that the German sense of freedom was merely the barbaric independence of men without settled property. He is reaffirming the vision of the common law as a constantly if precariously asserted set of ancient customs traceable as far back as Alfred or beyond; and we must re-assess his scepticism about the ancient constitution to allow for a sense of the enduring persistence of ancient law, which makes the English before and after the Conquest a deeply legalistic people. The Appendix to his first volume offers a general history of the feudal law in Europe, in which such moderns as Montesquieu and Robertson are cited for the first time,[226] designed to show how such concepts as right, liberty and consent could take root amid its violence and oppressiveness, and how

the establishment of the Great Charter, without seeming anywise to innovate in the distribution of political power, became a kind of epoch in the constitution.[227]

'The constitution', which is 'in a state of continual fluctuation', so that

[225] *History*, I, pp. 444–6; Hume, 1762, vol. I, pp. 387–9. [226] *History*, I, p. 455 nn.
[227] *History*, I, p. 488; Hume, 1762, vol. I, p. 424. These are the concluding words of the first volume. Cf. vol. II, p. 4.

three or four 'ancient constitutions' can be discerned in the history of England,[228] is nevertheless something of which a continuous history can be written; meaning that there must always be some 'distribution of political power' which inhabitants of a society expect to be more or less normal. Hume is opposed only to doctrines of an 'ancient constitution' which affirm that some particular distribution and institutionalisation of power is ancient and invariant in England. That there is ancient law is beside the point; what has been lacking is an apparatus which permits men to govern themselves in ways which include this law, so that its continuous workings are not constantly interrupted by political violence.

In the second volume we proceed through the reign of Henry III, in which signs of a sense of public responsibility are now and then visible. This has some unexpected sources.

> It must be acknowledged, that the influence of the prelates and the clergy was often of great service to the public. Though the religion of that age can merit no better name than that of superstition, it served to unite a body of men who had great sway over the people, and who kept the community from falling to pieces, by the factions and independant power of the nobles. And what was of great importance, it threw a mighty authority into the hands of men, who by their profession were averse to arms and violence; who tempered by their mediation the general disposition towards military enterprizes; and who still maintained, even amidst the shock of arms, those secret links, without which it is impossible for human society to subsist.[229]

Religion is the object of a philosopher's undying hatred when it erects an authority independent of that of civil society; but a religion controlled by society, or even a religion theocratically governing society, is not necessarily the enemy of sociability. The 'superstition' of Becket was a disaster because it was an idolatrous worship of the church's independent authority, but that was a product rather of theology than of the religion of the senses. About superstition in the original sense there is always something persistently social, and it is a long time, at the outset of the thirteenth century, since we have heard mention of enthusiasm. The public as well as the ecclesiastical space is becoming institutionalised and incorporated; there is an increasing sense that the king meets with his realm in parliament; and in the thirteenth century we encounter the problem of the origin of the commons. About 1680 it had been intensively debated whether a parliament including representatives of the shires and boroughs had formed part of the ancient constitution, and

[228] Above, p. 240. [229] *History*, II, p. 14; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 10.

partisans of the monarchy had argued that they were first summoned by the rebel Simon de Montfort in 1265 and had been subsequently continued by the prerogative and condescension of the kings.[230] Hume endorsed this argument, emphasising that Montfort was the accidental beginner of a process to which only the decline of the feudal system had given meaning; and in a later eleven-page 'digression concerning the constitution of parliament'[231] developed this thesis in an important direction. The House of Commons had long been made up of knights and burgesses, and the seventeenth-century historians Spelman and Brady had focused on the former, identifying them as a lesser nobility or *barones minores*, who as they grew less dependent on the magnates had been summoned to send representatives of their shire-based communities to advise the king in parliament. This explained the origin of the House as representative of the shires; the representation of the boroughs was a distinct question and Brady had written a treatise to explain it.[232] Hume followed him in both particulars, but now added the important thesis – long in gestation but cardinal for most Enlightened historians – that the growth of towns over all Latin Europe, with their *bourgeoisie*, *Burgertum*, burghers and burgesses, had been the crucial civilising force leading out of barbarism and feudalism to commerce, politeness, liberty and civility.[233] In England, where boroughs were more numerous than towns, this story had to be told in the context of the history of parliament, where there was no *tiers état* representing the towns (or the *bourgeoisie*) alone; and Hume set himself to explain how the commons – the true third estate[234] – had been formed by a merger of knights representing shires and burgesses representing boroughs, until a point had been reached where 'gentlemen' (the old lesser nobility) normally served in the latter capacity and controlled it.[235] At the same time the practice of summoning the clergy to attend parliament as a body had fallen into disuse, and they had never formed the first estate in a system of three estates like that of France.[236] The first and third estates of that conceptualisation being lacking, it is not clear in what sense Hume thought it applicable in England. If – as is probable – he thought of the king as the first 'estate' in a trinity of king, lords and commons, he would have explained this concession as part of the 'republican' component in

[230] Pocock, 1987a, pp. 153, 158–9, 161, 185–6, 205 and *passim*. See also Wexler, 1979.
[231] *History*, II, pp. 99–110.
[232] Brady, 1690. *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* probably gives this treatise less weight than it deserves. [233] *History*, II, pp. 105–6, 522–3. [234] *History*, II, p. 109.
[235] *History*, II, p. 108: 'knights and lesser barons, or what the English call the gentry'. Is it implied that the phenomenon is unknown in pre-Union Scotland? [236] *History*, II, p. 110.

English government. As this argument in the end implies, the more vigorously he contested the ancient constitution thesis, the more he was involved in that contestation.

It had been part of the previous century's debate that the lesser gentry – let alone the burgesses – could not have been summoned to parliament while they were the mere vassals of their lords, and even after summons could not have acted as an independent force while they were their retainers and wore their liveries. Hume develops this point in a way which returns to the argument of his Stuart volumes. As the Norman feudal 'system' declined, it became more necessary to summon knights and burgesses to parliament, but these did not know what to do with their new independence and, faced with the unlimited prerogative of the king and the unlimited privilege of the magnates, fell into dependence upon whichever of the two was uppermost in the unending fluctuation of medieval politics. It would take several centuries and two revolutions – the revolution of enthusiasm and the revolution in manners – to teach them a new role. 'We now return', says Hume, 'to the course of our narration', which has to be set in the context of the great wars fought by Edward I in Britain, Wales and Scotland, and by Edward III in France, Normandy and Guienne. These in turn can be understood in a context of social change – the commutation of feudal services for cash which made the king able to hire mercenaries and the magnates able to maintain retainers – and a context of European history. We are in the age of the Valois, the French monarchy's triumphs over the Hohenstaufen, the papacy and the Templars, and the internal weaknesses of its overgrown strength. The wars of the Plantagenets are distinct from the wars of the Angevins, in part because cultural changes are beginning to occur, only checked by the calamity of the Black Death. Hume notes the appearance of gunpowder,

> this furious engine, which, though it seemed contrived for the destruction of mankind, and the overthrow of empires, has in the issue rendered battles less bloody, and has given greater stability to civil societies. Nations, by its means, have been brought more to a level: Conquests have become less frequent and rapid: Success in war has been reduced nearly to be a matter of calculation: And any nation, overmatched by its enemies, either yields to their demands, or secures itself by alliances against their violence and invasion.[237]

In Hume's pre-Clausewitzian Europe, it was possible to believe that the *ultima ratio regum* had brought a post-heroic moderation to the battlefield

[237] *History*, II, p. 230; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 196.

and diplomacy. He notes the appearance of chivalry, generally supposed to have refined the manners of feudal barbarism by inducing a protective gallantry towards 'the fair sex', but remarkable in Hume's eyes because it produced a series of viragos admirable in policy and war: the countess of Montfort, the countess of Blois, and Edward III's queen Philippa of Hainault, who defeats the Scottish king at Neville's Cross before displaying mercy to the burghers of Calais.

> This age was the reign of chivalry and gallantry: Edward's court excelled in these accomplishments as much as in policy and arms: And if any thing could justify the obsequious devotion then professed to the fair sex, it must be the appearance of such extraordinary women as shone forth during that period.[238]

Hume respected viragos and heroines, and did not think them prodigies against nature; he also liked noting that the timbers of humanity were as crooked in the history of manners as in that of statecraft. The fourteenth century sees also a rebirth of enthusiasm, itself perhaps a product of an increased affluence which makes the manners of the clergy more visible; there are Wyclif,[239] the Lollards,[240] Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague,[241] and in the next century most extraordinarily Joan of Arc, a woman, an enthusiast, a prophet, a warrior, but not (like all other enthusiasts) a heretic since she has no doctrine to preach.

> This admirable heroine, to whom the more generous superstition of the ancients would have erected altars, was, on pretence of heresy and magic, delivered over alive to the flames and expiated by that dreadful punishment the signal services which she had rendered to her prince and her native country.[242]

We see how enthusiasm can lead to a revival of patriotic virtue, not yet of enlightened sociability, the conditions for which do not yet exist. The era is one of popular rebellion, and the peasant insurgencies of 1358 in France[243] and 1381 in England[244] are used (in language recalling Voltaire) to remind us that when an utterly repressed class asserts the rights of nature, a state of nature and therefore of savagery will result. The problem is not simply that of oppression and resistance, but of the capacity of society to contain these phenomena, and applies to the conduct of the elite as well. Recounting the deposition of Richard II in 1399 – always an uncomfortable precedent for the revolution of 1688 – Hume treads a Tory path in giving space to the protest of the bishop of

[238] *History*, II, p. 236 (also 235, 238); Hume, 1762, vol. II, pp. 201–3.
[239] *History*, II, pp. 326–8. [240] *History*, II, p. 355. [241] *History*, II, p. 379.
[242] *History*, II, p. 410; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 347. [243] *History*, II, pp. 254–5.
[244] *History*, II, pp. 290–2.

Carlisle, which 'may seem to favour too much the doctrine of passive obedience', but is really a statesmanlike warning against the consequences of 'a total subversion of the constitution';[245] but whiggishly concludes:

> All the circumstances of this event, compared to those which attended the late revolution of 1688, show the difference between a great and civilised nation deliberately vindicating its established principles, and a turbulent and barbarous aristocracy, plunging headlong from the extremes of one faction into those of another.[246]

It is not really relevant that Hume has earlier left it open to suppose that the English of 1688–9 were not so much vindicating established principles as establishing them clearly for the first time. The point is that the English of 1399 lacked the capacity to do either. The ancient principles of Magna Carta did not perform the distribution of power necessary in order to maintain them;[247] and an intolerably peccant prince could be dealt with only by rebellion, deposition and murder, as had for centuries been the case in Scotland and was still the case in the vastly more developed England of 1649, but had ceased to be the case forty years later. The usurping Lancastrian kings did not fully legitimate their rule, and when dynastic conflict broke out in the reign of Henry VI what Hume continues to call the constitution was unable to contain it. Because 'the sword was in the hands of the subject . . . the government, though thrown into temporary disorder, soon settled itself on its ancient foundations',[248] and yet the violence was perpetual because it was limited in its effects. Hume assumes that this was an intolerable condition, and is drawing near the Hobbesian arcanum that the subject can be at peace only when he has surrendered the sword as the means of assuring his liberty. The fifteenth-century commons were unable to end the disorder of dynastic politics because they were neither the subjects of a state possessed of a standing army nor a Harringtonian people with the sword in their own hands. They were not a people of vassals and serfs reduced to feudal subjection; Hume is emphatic that their predicament resulted from its decline and fall:

> the whole force of the feudal system was in a manner dissolved, and . . . the English had nearly returned in that particular to the same situation, in which they stood before the Norman conquest. It was indeed impossible, that that

[245] *History*, II, p. 319. The bishop's protest occurs in the histories of Richard II from Shakespeare to Brady. [246] *History*, II, pp. 320–1; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 272. [247] *History*, II, pp. 283–4.
[248] *History*, II, p. 346; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 293.

> system could long subsist under the perpetual revolutions, to which landed property is everywhere subject. When the great feudal baronies were first erected, the lord lived in opulence in the midst of his vassals: he was in a situation to protect and cherish and defend them: The quality of patron naturally united itself to that of superior: And these two principles of authority mutually supported each other. But when, by the various divisions and mixtures of property, a man's superior came to live at a distance from him, and could no longer give him shelter or countenance; the tie gradually became more fictitious than real: New connexions from vicinity or other causes were formed: Protection was sought by voluntary services and attachment: The appearance of valour, spirit, abilities in any great man extended his interest very far: And if the sovereign were deficient in these qualities, he was no less, if not more exposed to the usurpations of the aristocracy, than even during the vigour of the feudal system.[249]

The great fiefdom, held together by an ethos of homage, was replaced by the great household[250] with its more mobile and mercenary retainers. If there is an analogy between them and the housecarls of an Anglo-Saxon earl or king, they are the antithesis of bastard feudalism; they exist because social change has not yet produced new manners or a new economy. When it does, the retainers and household servants will be absorbed into the productive trades and wage-discipline of a new world, though exactly how military power operated and was paid for during the Tudor and Stuart interval between magnate warfare and the standing armies remains a problem of some post-Harringtonian difficulty. Meanwhile, the House of Commons during the wars of Lancaster and York finds itself growing more important in the kingdom, to the point where its consent must be sought to the legitimation of events,[251] but not so powerful that it can impose the terms on which that consent will be given. In consequence:

> The measures of the parliament, during that age, furnish us with examples of a strange contrast of freedom and servility: They scruple to grant, and sometimes refuse, to the king the smallest supplies, the most necessary for the support of government , even the most necessary for the maintenance of wars, for which the nation, as well as the parliament itself, expressed great fondness: But they never scruple to concur in the most flagrant act of injustice or tyranny, which falls on any individual, however distinguished by birth or merit. These maxims, so ungenerous, so opposite to all principles of good government, so contrary to the practice of present parliaments, are very remarkable in all the transactions of the English history for more than a century after the period in which we are now engaged [i.e. 1478].[252]

[249] *History*, II, pp. 331–2; Hume, 1762, vol. II, pp. 281–2. [250] *History*, II, p. 428.
[251] *History*, II, pp. 439, 452–3. [252] *History*, II, pp. 491–2; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 417.

It would be hard to say that this passage is free from irony or contemporary resonance; but in 1762 it was some time since parliament had been called on to approve acts of judicial murder, proscription or dynastic change, and by performing the last action in 1689 they had put an end to the era in which they might find themselves as helpless as they had been two centuries earlier. The Yorkist parliaments were faced with the last occasion on which the incoherence of the ancient constitution could produce massive noble violence; their Tudor successors faced an era when the constitution was just as incoherent, but the power of magnates and their retainers had collapsed. They saw only the prerogative in action and gave their voluntary consent to a despotism; their Stuart successors, having had time to think, asserted their medieval liberties against the prerogative, in a constitutional situation as incoherent as if there were still barons to make it so. Thus far the history of manners could carry the story, before the history of enthusiasm intervened.

Hume's Stuart history had reached only the brink of the modern solution to the problem of post-medieval government; his medieval history had brought him to the brink of the establishment of that problem. Since he did not write the history of modern government, which began only in 1689, the pages in which he sums up medieval and barbaric history are in an important way the last word of his *History of England*. They look back on the age of barbarism and religion, the millennium which followed the decline and fall of the Roman empire; and the first thing he has to say is that in so far as the history of this millennium consists in the history of the English kingdom, it is not as obscure, barbarous and worthless as conventional enlightenment supposes. The allusion seems to be mainly to the monastic historians, and even Thomas Becket, when he says:

> This advantage we owe entirely to the clergy of the church of Rome; who, founding their authority on their superior knowledge, preserved the precious literature of antiquity from a total extinction; and under shelter of their numerous privileges and immunities, acquired a security, by means of the superstition, which they would in vain have claimed, from the justice and humanity of those turbulent and licentious ages.[253]

There is always something to be said for superstition, and the clerical monopoly of learning must have had some good consequences among so many bad. Even the narrative of barbarous actions has something to

[253] *History*, II, p. 518; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 440.

tell us about the history of manners, and Hume – writing here *en érudit* rather than *en philosophe* – can find the seeds of recovery deeper in the barbarous millennium, and in less expected places, than the cruder Enlightened historians. After a fairly conventional introduction to the age of barbarism – Roman despotism extinguishing civic virtue, military government undermining even its own genius, barbaric invasion clearing the way to superstition – he goes on:

> But there is a point of depression, as well as exaltation, from which human affairs naturally return in a contrary direction, and beyond which they seldom pass either in their advancement or decline. The period, in which the people of Christendom were the lowest sunk in ignorance, and consequently in disorders of every kind, may justly be fixed at the eleventh century, about the age of William the Conqueror.[254]

The metaphor was long established, but the nadir was usually set earlier; Robertson, we shall see, placed it in the sixth and seventh centuries; and Hume's choice meant that the age of the papacy was in fact an age of recovery. The barbarians had learned agriculture; the feudal system was at least a system; and most remarkable of all, it had been the Roman clergy, those inveterate rivals to all civil authority, who had rediscovered and disseminated everywhere that central science of civil society, the Roman jurisprudence.

> It is easy to see what advantages Europe must have reaped by its inheriting at once from the ancients, so complete an art, which was also so necessary for giving security to all other arts, and which, by refining, and still more, by bestowing solidity on the judgment, served as a model to farther improvements. The sensible utility of the Roman law both to public and private interest recommended the study of it, at a time when the more exalted and speculative sciences carried no charms with them; and thus the last branch of ancient literature, which remained uncorrupted, was happily the first transmitted to the modern world. For it is remarkable, that in the decline of Roman learning, when the philosophers were universally infected with superstition and sophistry, and the poets and historians with barbarism, the lawyers, who, in other countries are seldom models of science or politeness, were yet able, by the constant study and close imitation of their predecessors, to maintain the same good sense in their decisions and reasonings, and the same purity in their language and expression.[255]

This is to make the civilians forerunners of the humanists; but Hume presents jurisprudence as integral to feudal-clerical culture at its most

[254] *History*, II, p. 519; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 441.
[255] *History*, II, p. 521; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 442.

medieval. Roman law penetrates and illuminates the rude customs of the barbarians, especially among the *divisos ab orbe Britannos* and among them especially the English;

> and in the age of Henry VI, as we are told by Fortescue, there were in the Inns of Court about two thousand students, most of them men of honourable birth, who gave application to this branch of civil knowledge: A circumstance which proves, that a considerable progress was already made in the science of government, and which prognosticated a still greater.[256]

Hume is moving at breathtaking speed. From Fortescue to Coke, and from Selden to Hale, the English had insisted on the essential independence of their common law from Roman law, and no small sophistication was required to recognise that Roman *ratio legis* had played a part in its making. Hume was a Scot, and sometime[257] Librarian to the Faculty of Advocates in Edinburgh, where he would have heard much about the role of Roman law in the creation of Scottish jurisprudence, some of it from men who could discern its presence in English law as well; yet he had acknowledged the Wessex kings and Anglo-Saxon customs as creators of the common law which Magna Carta had confirmed, and to make the English leaders of European jurisprudence was effrontery unusual even for him. Hume sometimes exercised a gift for pronouncing the wholly counter-factual with an air of judicious irrefutability. This is not uncommon when philosophers write history; but we are dealing with perhaps the only philosopher to have been not merely a good, but a great historian.

The spread of law protects the arts; the progress of the arts is the progress of freedom, which 'affected men both in their *personal* and *civil* capacities',[258] and the two proceed together as the technique develops of privileging and incorporating towns. The *bourgeois* theory of freedom has returned to centre stage, but in so far as the theory and practice of incorporation has to be learned from Roman law, the lawyers must invent the burghers, and it is hard to say how far we are looking at English history at this point.[259] Whereas in the ancient world the spread of the arts led to an increase of slavery – the masters acquiring skilled slaves to practise them – in the medieval world its effect was the spread of freedom, less because artisans became freemen in corporations than because the services of villeins were commuted into cash payments and they became free labourers, tenants and farmers.[260] We have turned

[256] *History*, II, p. 522; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 443. [257] 1752–7. [258] *History*, II, p. 522.
[259] *History*, II, pp. 522–4. [260] *History*, II, p. 524.

from the urban to the agrarian scene, and are now looking at England, where the freedom of boroughs became an adjunct to the freedom of shires; and the last word of Hume's *History of England* is an admonition on the subject of the ancient constitution, which concludes the medieval volumes as it concluded the Tudor. Though there is no time at which some liberty is not to be found in 'the constitution of the English government', its history is one of fluctuation between the extremes of power in the hands of monarchy, aristocracy, and the commons, between 'a kind of Polish Aristocracy' and 'a regular and equitable plan of liberty'. Only established present practice is a reliable guide to political conduct, and those

> who, from a pretended respect to antiquity, appeal at every turn to an original plan of the constitution, only cover their turbulent spirit and their private ambition under the appearance of venerable forms; and whatever period they pitch on for their model, they may still be carried back to a more ancient period, when they will find the measures of power entirely different, and where every circumstance, by reason of the greater barbarity of the times, will appear still less worthy of imitation . . . An acquaintance with the ancient periods of their government is chiefly *useful* by instructing them to cherish their present constitution, from a comparison or contrast with the condition of those distant times. And it is also *curious*, by shewing them the remote, and commonly faint and disfigured originals of the most finished and most noble institutions, and by instructing them in the great mixture of accident, which commonly concurs with a small ingredient of wisdom and foresight, in erecting the complicated fabric of the most perfect government.[261]

Hume completed writing, and went on revising, the *History of England* in a mood of concern with the increasingly violent language of ancient-constitutionalism during the 1760s and 1770s, when Old Corps Whigs attacked the monarchy for breaking with the aristocracy and Old True Whigs – with their radical Tory allies – attacked both monarchy and aristocracy for their corrupt alliance with each other. These polemics led not only to a renewed use of ancient-constitution and Saxon-liberty arguments, but to the writing of histories of the form of government set up in 1688; such modern histories as Hume allegedly declared he was 'too old, too fat, too lazy and too rich'[262] – possibly also too ill – to write, but which had to be written since it was the structure of the revolution and Hanoverian regime which was in debate. Between 1763 and 1765 Tobias Smollett published a history of England to the death of George

[261] *History*, II, p. 525; Hume, 1762, vol. II, p. 446. The concluding words of the volume and (in order of composition) of the *History*.
[262] The words may be apocryphal; Mossner, 1970, pp. 555–6.

II, designed as a continuation of Hume;[263] between 1763 and 1781, with certain interruptions, Catharine Macaulay published her *History of England from the Accession of James I to that of the Brunswick Line*,[264] probably the principal competitor of Hume's history in the years following its appearance. Both Smollett and Macaulay thought the Revolution, in bridling the royal prerogative, had opened the door to a vast increase of royal influence; and both asked the dangerous republican-Jacobite question whether it might not have been better to retain James II, restoring him to his throne on stringent conditions, than to have left William III free to carry out a vast increase in the crown's military, financial and patronage powers.[265] Hume could not but find this embarrassing; though he believed and repeatedly said that the influence of the crown was necessary to counterbalance the increasing power of the House of Commons, he also believed and repeatedly said – and patriot writers could quote him as saying[266] – that the vast increase of the national debt would prove fatal to the whole edifice. What angered him about the London 'disaffected patriots'[267] – to whom Catharine Macaulay belonged in virtue of her birth as a Sawbridge – was that they were the political heirs of the elder Pitt, under whose ministry the debt of which they complained had more than doubled.

He must therefore have regarded Macaulay's *History* as speaking with the voice of 'those insolent rascals in London and Middlesex',[268] who were pushing the republican component in the constitution to the point where they might provoke an absolutist response; but he wrote of it and to her with temperate respect (unlike Samuel Johnson, whom she stirred to spiteful rage).[269] Hume may well have recognised that her powers of research in libraries and manuscript collections exceeded his own. It is worth adding that she implicitly rejected altogether the compromise of gender which we have detected in Hume's philosophy of history. As a convinced republican, she was interested in neither the history of manners which would reveal to women their role in a courtly and commercial polite society, nor the Tacitean historiography which narrated the arcane politics of courts and councils. In a sustained protest against the historiography predominant in Enlightenment, she wrote history in search of that Roman virtue which she said was her second

[263] Smollett, 1757.
[264] Macaulay, 1763–71, 1778, 1781. An analytical study of Macaulay's historical and political writings has yet to appear; for biography see Bridget Hill, 1992.
[265] Smollett, 1757 (Philadelphia edn of 1822), I, pp. 5–6, 8 and n.; Macaulay, 1778, pp. 4–6, 79–80.
[266] Price, 1778. [267] Saintsbury, 1987. [268] Greig, 1932, vol. III, p. 303.
[269] Bridget Hill, 1992, p. 2.

religion – leaving the first unspecified – and found it only in Vane, Sidney and Milton, the lost legislators of the Rump Parliament before Cromwell dissolved it.[270] When she could, she went to America to meet with Mercy Otis Warren, later the historian of republican virtue which had perhaps triumphed in successful acts of foundation.[271] Even in the United States, however, we might ask whether virtue was not a protest against the course history was taking, and why these powerful female intellects adopted so primarily masculine a central value as that of classical citizenship.

This question is worth pursuing because it takes us into the climate of the years in which Hume ended his life and Gibbon wrote the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*. It was a climate intensely factional and divided, involved in rebellion and almost in civil war; the climate in which Hume's apparently eirenic *History* seemed to him to have been received with universal execration; the climate he thought so conducive to a revival of fanaticism and the decay of taste that it was a wonder that an Englishman could have written such a work as the *Decline and Fall*.[272] This was the climate which, Gibbon says, made him shrink as early as 1762 from writing any history of England,[273] and turn instead to the end of antiquity and the millennium of barbarism and religion. In what ways, if any, the text of the *Decline and Fall* can be connected with the years of the American war in which it appeared we have not begun to enquire; but if Enlightenment in the extended monarchy of the Hanoverian empire was intended to make an end of religious dispute and political faction, Hume and Gibbon in 1776 were witnesses to its failure. The former died and the latter began to publish in the era of the Present Discontents, Rational Dissent and American Revolution. It was a historiographical consequence that for Anglo-British historians the second half at least of the Christian millennium (1000–1500) was full of questions needing to be answered in order to understand the present, so that the frontier between the useful and the curious could never be fixed and needed constantly to be pushed back. This is not quite the spirit in which Voltaire wrote of the age of darkness; the involvement of past and present was not the same. We have now to consider how William Robertson, second of the triumvirate of British historians, erected an account of the Christian millennium far fuller than Hume's and of great significance to Gibbon.

[270] Macaulay, 1763–71, vol. I, p. vii; vol. V, pp. 94–5.
[271] Warren, 1805. Bridget Hill, 1992, pp. 126–8. [272] Above, p. 175, n. 31.
[273] Above, p. 173.

SECTION IV

William Robertson and the history of Europe

CHAPTER 16

The problems of historiography: the Scottish perspective

Hume's *History of England* has been analysed at length in the foregoing chapters because it contains an extraordinary wealth of explanatory narratives: historiographical devices which both recount and explain moments of crisis and processes of change in systems of law and government, opinion and religion. The wealth of these tends to increase as the *History* moves out of 'medieval' and into 'modern' conditions, because this is a movement into intensified conditions of civil government, in which the laws and tensions of civil society become increasingly visible and supply more means of explanation; Hume is not free from Voltaire's conviction that the *moeurs* of barbarism and religion are too crude and irrational to require, or consequently to permit, much analysis or explanation. When his capacity to explain the religious psychology he otherwise despised supplies him with interesting accounts of medieval behaviour, he is likely to add that these belong to the entertaining rather than the useful area of historical study – though as we have seen the frontier between the two may shift and cannot be fixed with finality. The *History of England* is, however, replete with explanatory accounts of the *moeurs* and *esprit*, to use Voltaire's terminology, of the nation or nations with which it is concerned; and these are organised into a consecutive narrative, while pressing forward with a richness that challenges comparison with the *Esprit des lois* itself (it is worth remembering that Hume's *Essays* are concurrent with Montesquieu's work, his *History* with the *Essai sur les moeurs*, and that while his work in philosophical history interacted with that of his great contemporaries, it is derived from neither of them).

Where Montesquieu had attempted a general science, or rather a natural history, of human behaviour in the fields of *lois* and *moeurs* – on

which Hume of course drew – Hume's work is a narrative, a civil history, a history of 'England' as a national, governmental and religious structure undergoing change, crisis and transformation. Hume thought it necessary for Scots to take this history for their own, possible for them to understand it better than the English themselves did. It is because his 'philosophical' history is working within this narrative, and drawing on all the resources available for the construction of historical narratives, that its 'philosophical' dimension displays unusual richness; it is mobilised less to display patterns of human behaviour obedient to general laws, than to recount and explain moments of change within a particular system (England) and within the cluster of systems (Europe) to which England belongs, and its *principes* and *ressorts* – to use Montesquieuan language – operate within a particular narrative. It is likely that Hume considered this the only way in which the operation of general laws could be made visible, and a consequence would be that we have reached a point at which Momiglianan 'philosophy' is placed in harness with 'narrative' and 'erudition' as equal motive forces. We know that Hume held the narrative of particular actions, Tacitean *arcana* and the like, to enjoy a certain independence from the history of law-governed collective behaviour, and this may explain how the *History* combines the narrative of systemic transformation with the organisation of history by reigns. Neither Montesquieuan nor Tacitean historiography, however, altogether accounts for the richness of its narrative and explanatory structure, and for this we must turn to the circumstance that Hume was operating within an already formed and highly contestatory discourse, that of English history.

Since the splendidly detailed analysis of the *History* carried out by Duncan Forbes a quarter of a century ago,[1] it has been customary to contrast Hume's perception of English history with a 'vulgar whiggism' which certainly existed and to which he certainly responded with energy. It has been defined as a crude ancient-constitutionalism which insisted on the uniqueness, antiquity and perhaps autochthony of English institutions, and sought the explanation of English history entirely within their history; a consequence particularly irritating to Hume was the practice of narrating the seventeenth-century civil wars in terms of a monarchy bent on overthrowing the ancient constitution and a parliament bent on maintaining it. Hume – the received interpretation continues – undermined 'vulgar whiggism' by emphasising the compo-

[1] Forbes, 1975 (paperback 1985), pp. 125–93, 233–60.

nents of English history which England shared with other European cultures: the feudal monarchy imported by the Normans, against which the Tudors had responded so strongly that a parliamentary counter-response had been necessary under the Stuarts; the points which Hanoverian monarchy had in common with the European absolutisms, including the capacity to protect arts and enlightenment against the philistinism of republican liberty. This reading, in many ways highly justifiable, has permitted the received interpretation to identify vulgar whiggism with ancient-constitutionalism and both with the practice of writing English history as if it explained itself; so that Hume has become the exponent of a 'cosmopolitan' historiography said to characterise Enlightenment in opposition to a practice of writing history in 'national contexts'.[2]

It is contended here, however, that the *History of England* owes much of its richness and toughness to the circumstances that it is the narrative of a particular 'national context', and that this context already possessed a narrative structure, not reducible to 'vulgar whiggism' – however prominent and pestilent Hume found that to be – but on the contrary replete with contestable explanations and counter-explanations, themselves capable of being enlarged in 'cosmopolitan' and 'philosophical' directions. It was not new to contend that Norman feudal tenures rendered the idea of an ancient constitution untenable, so that English liberties were rather modern than ancient; Hume indeed, having urged this argument energetically, fell back on the idea of Anglo-Saxon laws and customs, as old as the time of Alfred, which the barons of 1215 revived and re-interpreted for their own purposes. He did not argue that the ancient constitution was non-existent, only that its meaning had been repeatedly transformed in the dialectic with its opposing principles. Nor did he think it 'vulgar whiggism' to assert its existence (though there was a vulgar whiggism which did); for at least a century it had been possible to anchor the ancient constitution less in the autochthonous customs of the English than in the 'Gothic' liberties and tenures common to all invaders of the western Roman empire, an argument no more insular or less 'European' than its Norman-feudal opposite. We are seeing that Hume's capacity for philosophic dialectic owes a good deal – which is not to say everything – to the circumstance that English national history, like history written in some other 'national contexts', was an argument with itself, and possessed recognised rhetorics and

[2] Robertson, 1997b; O'Brien, 1997.

discourses for the conduct of that argument. Ancient constitution and feudal law furnished one such debate; the argument between Catholic, Arminian, Calvinist and Erastian views of English churchmanship was another, possessing a literature with which Hume, for all his contempt of Christianity, was far from unacquainted; the supersession of Tudor-Stuart by Williamite-Hanoverian monarchy was a third, with which he chose not to deal (leaving it in the event to Smollett and Macaulay).

The *History of England* is a triumph of the Enlightened narrative because – not although – it is the narrative of a national context, which the 'cosmopolitan' and 'philosophical' components of Hume's mind enabled him to present with a new critical intensity, and because this narrative was already a discourse between contested positions, which Hume's philosophical capacity enabled him further to historise. He saw European history, from the late fifteenth century on, as the rise of a series of such national contexts, between which there existed relationships of the sort we should call cosmopolitan, but some at least of which displayed internal contestations and dialectics which it was philosophically important to study, because the struggle between liberty and authority was waged here and not elsewhere. He thought Scots should study the English national context and not their own, but he thought them in some ways better qualified to do so. To understand this paradox we must consider what it was like for Scots to consider history when their own national context seemed to be under-equipped with the contestatory discourses that made English history interesting.

If the English problem was that the national history was not being rewritten in polite and neo-classical terms fast enough to satisfy a perceived need, the Scottish problem was that a paradigmatic mode of writing the national history was being abandoned during the first half of the eighteenth century, and that it was by no means clear what historiography, national or otherwise, was to take its place. From this problematic there emerged a Scottish style, and school, of philosophical and universal history, by which Gibbon was deeply affected without belonging to it, and which deeply satisfied those who felt the need of it, though its success in providing a new history of Scotland as a kingdom and nation is still open to debate.

The abandoned paradigm was that associated with the name of George Buchanan.[3] During the wars of independence that began in the late thirteenth century, the medieval Scottish kingdom had answered

[3] In what follows I am especially indebted to Williamson, 1979 and Mason, 1994, in particular Part II, chs. 4–6 (by Rebecca Bushnell, Roger A. Mason and J. H. Burns).

the Anglo–Norman and Welsh–Norman claim to suzerainty through Arthurian and Trojan descent by inventing a Greek counter-myth, that of Gathelus and Scota, which entailed a symbolic migration through Scythia and Egypt, Spain and Ireland. The verbal equivalences of 'Scythi' and 'Scoti', 'Gathelus' and 'Gael', conveyed the message that the Scots from whom the kingdom took its name had originally been Irish Gaels, though the Gaelic component was only one, and not often the most highly regarded, among the many ethnic elements – British, Pictish, Anglian, Norse and Norman – making up the highly diversified construct of 'Scotland'. Following John Mair and Hector Boethius, the first proto-humanist historians of Scotland, Buchanan – one of the most highly regarded scholars of sixteenth-century Latin Europe – had improved on the more far-fetched genealogies of the national myth by supposing a line of Dalriadic kings – Fergus mac Ferquhard and Fergus mac Erc – settling in Argyll from Ireland and unifying the kingdom through conquest. Whether this conquest had been carried out under the monarchical authority of one Fergus or the other, or by the companions of the conqueror acting as a warband of warrior equals, was a problem familiar to the age of resistance theory, constitutionalism and the wars of religion; and Buchanan, a Protestant militant active in the resistance to Mary Stuart and the tutelage of James VI – whose tutor he indeed was – had developed the myth of a Scottish 'ancient constitution',[4] consisting in the capacity, and therefore the right, of warlike nobles to band together against wicked kings, from Macbeth to Mary, whom they might on occasion depose and even slay. Horrifying in England – where monarchy was both more absolute and more constitutional – the spectacle of regicide was more familiar and less startling to the Scottish mind. There was no Scottish Shakespeare to turn it into grand-guignol.

Two features of Buchanan's synthesis may be isolated as important to later Scots historiography. In the first place, the Dalriadic or Irish component of his narrative was prominent enough to entail some recognition of the Gaelic and other Celtic presences in Scottish history and nationality; but antipathy between these and the Anglian and Norman components, out of which the kingdom had in fact been constructed, was on occasion so strong as to ensure that, well into the eighteenth century, Scotland – and so Britain – was the only major state of western Europe which believed itself to possess a barbarian frontier as

[4] Trevor-Roper, 1966.

part of its structure. There could take shape an indistinct but momentous perception that Cymric and Gaelic societies were founded upon allegiance through kinship as well as, or rather than, through feudal tenure, and that this might be the reason why the ties of kindred were so pervasive of all Scottish ethnic groups as to give rise to the epithet 'kindly Scots' – 'kindly' indicating less benevolence than solidarity. Humanist political culture was everywhere engaged in converting an independent nobility of the sword into a nobility of court and counsel, and preferred the unifying effects of law – even at a pinch, a law of tenure – to those of kinship, which could never be centred on a king only by metaphor patriarchal. Here was a problem for Scottish humanists, which drove them in the end to historicising the differences between a law-based and a kin-based society.

In the second place, however, it must be recognised that Buchanan's 'ancient constitution' – the term has been foisted upon him by historians – was one only by courtesy, if we use the term in its English sense. That is, in Scotland it entailed neither a common custom of the whole realm, administered in the king's courts and elaborately interpreted by his lawyers, nor a parliament representing the realm as a whole and vastly enlarging the king's person as its representative. The English 'constitution' consisted in these huge and effective fictions, and it was within the framework they provided that the battles between the king's two persons, between his authority and his law, were fought out on a scale amounting at times to civil war in the strict sense. By comparison, Buchanan depicted less a constitution than an institutionalised 'liberty' or right of resistance, possessing indeed a discourse and a set of conventions – above all the 'band', confederation or covenant between the resistants – but no set of normally governing institutions or 'law'. To those thinkers who presupposed the commonwealth or *res publica*, Buchanan's Scotland could look like a Polish *rzeczpospolita*, a confederation of nobles but not a polity of citizens or subjects;[5] and if this was an unjust description of Scotland, it was Buchanan's language that seemed inadequate.

Within the structure of English historiography, centred upon the dispute over the ancient constitution, there had emerged at least three paradigms of legislation and structural change: the supposed establishment of a body of custom-based laws by the Wessex kings, the supposed massive imposition of imported feudal tenures by the Normans, and the

[5] Polish historians will contest this description of the Polish republic. See Walicki, 1982.

supposed termination of the feudal structure by the parliamentary legislation of the first Tudor. The narrative to be derived from Buchanan provided a less complete history of laws and tenures. Fergus of Dalriada might have imposed new Gaelic laws or confirmed older Pictish and British; Malcolm II in the eleventh century (Shakespeare's hero) might have introduced English or Norman feudal tenures, and there was a history to be written of the conflict between Celtic and Anglo-Norman structures of arms-bearing and landholding. But this would involve the penetration of a remote and non-Roman past, and must be written by historians who were philosophers rather than architects of a national history. And latterly, the record of the Stuart kings from James I through James V contained no equivalents for Bacon's Henry VII putting an end to the military power of his nobility, or Harrington's Henry VIII completing his work by the redistribution of monastic lands seized by the crown.[6] Enlightened historiography entailed a search for the origins of a post-feudal and post-ecclesiastical modernity. The English found an answer already built into their national history by the giants of seventeenth-century thinking, but Scots – who might doubt whether baronial power had disappeared till the deaths of Montrose and Argyll, or whether kin-based power had not recently descended upon them from the eighteenth-century Highlands – found it hard to discover in their past the agents of their own modernisation. The work seemed to have been begun only under union with England, after 1603 and 1688, 1707 or even 1745, and the price of enlightenment might be the conversion of Scotland into North Britain. And there was the memory of the Covenanting wars from 1637 to 1651, kept alive by the rebellions and secessions following them, to suggest that the Scottish wars of religion were still recent and the ecclesiastical dimensions of modernity not yet complete.

The progressive abandonment of Buchanan's model for Scottish historiography after 1688 – though it took time and has recently been presented as rather a response to 1745 than a preparation for 1707[7] – has to be viewed in this context, where it appears an abandonment of national for universal and philosophic historiography. The absence of a Scottish Henry VII helps explain why it was that Andrew Fletcher – Scotland's successor to Bacon and Harrington – presented the replacement of a society based on arms by one based on commerce as a general

[6] Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana: second part of the preliminaries* (1656), in Pocock, 1977, p. 198. ('Coraunus' is Henry VIII.)
[7] Kidd, 1993, ch. 5, pp. 70–99; an important study on which this section chiefly rests.

movement common to all western Europe.[8] It is important that he expressed a profound ambivalence about the process, seeing gains in commerce and enlightenment as paid for by a possible loss in virtue and liberty. Buchananite history now appeared a history of arms-bearing, a history of an antique Scotland alternatively virtuous and barbaric; Fletcher to this extent appeared as a republican, meaning a critic of modernity in the name of ancient values; but the absence of Scottish history from his narrative means that he saw it as explicable only as that of a province within a pan-European culture and its universal history. Fletcher's political writings include schemes for the reconstruction of both 'Britain' and 'Europe' as confederations of armed cantons.[9] This is not only his solution to the problem of virtue and commerce, which is the problem of modern history, but indicates his decision that since Scottish politics could not be understood or conducted in what we term 'nation-state' terms, European including British politics might be reconstructed on a basis not provided by the great national and multi-national monarchies.

It is now argued that Buchanan's paradigm was not replaced by any alternative mode of writing Scottish history as national, autonomous and self-acting, but that the strategy was adopted of assimilating it to a universal and philosophical history, among whose intellectual triumphs Scotland ceased to make any distinctive contributions to history – other, indeed, than the construction of the historiography in which its own history was swallowed up. To David Hume's claim regarding 'the historical age and the historical nation', Colin Kidd offers the counterpoint that 'Scottish patriotic historiography had burnt itself out. Nineteenth-century Scotland was the white dwarf of Europe.'[10] Perhaps, then, the philosophical histories constructed by the great writers of 'the Scottish Enlightenment' are to be seen in the role of red giant; but we begin our study of the intellectual movement known by the name just given by observing the effects of a decision that Scottish history – both modern and consequently ancient – was better understood in multicultural than in national terms. To understand that movement and its historiography, and to see what qualifies it as an 'Enlightenment', other factors will have to be taken into account; but we begin with the now familiar perception of Enlightenment as a programme for putting an end to religious and civil war by the institution of a commercial society

[8] Pocock, 1975; Robertson, 1985 and 1993b, chs. 3 (Laurence Dickey), 4 (David Armitage), 8 (John Robertson) and Robertson 1997c. [9] Robertson, 1997c, pp. 207–15; also Robertson, 1987.
[10] Kidd, 1993, p. 280; the concluding words of his text.

in which arms were no longer in private hands. Scottish philosophical historiography is a response to the decision that Scotland was incapable of conducting that institution by itself.

Given the importance of arms in the story, it is worth noting what the future giants of the Scottish Enlightenment were doing in the war preceding that in which Gibbon served as captain in the Hampshire militia. Adam Ferguson served in Flanders as chaplain to the Black Watch, one of the first regular Highland regiments in the British army;[11] David Hume wore the uniform of that army as a staff officer on an expedition to Lorient and then on an embassy to Turin and Vienna.[12] Henry Home, Lord Kames, withdrew into private study during the Jacobite occupation of Edinburgh, and was moved (he says) by the experience to begin researches into the history of feudal property in Great Britain.[13] William Robertson belonged to a group of young Edinburgh clerics horrified by the lack of resistance to the Jacobites into beginning the investigation of a polite society capable of military virtue.[14] Only Adam Smith is absent from the scene; he had recently held an Oxford fellowship and his Glasgow professorship did not begin till 1752. Of them all, David Hume is the most elusive figure. His literary career had already (if inauspiciously) begun; his philosophy was written in a French setting, and his history (not yet embarked on) is probably a response to English rather than Scottish politics; though always deeply conscious of his Scottishness, he is a cosmopolitan figure formed in a diversity of environments. Yet we have found a sense in which cosmopolitanism might be a response to the Scottish predicament, and there is a case for regarding Hume as forming in a 'European' setting[15] that culture of polite letters which would paradoxically equip him to resolve the crisis in English historiography.

Robertson and his colleagues must be differently regarded. Ministers of the kirk, professors of the university, judges (like Kames) of the College of Justice, they held (in Robertson's case they energetically pursued) office in the institutional structure by which Scotland was governed and the Union maintained. Enlightenment for them was a means of stabilising and enlarging the edifice of government, and they conducted its programmes from within that edifice. It is not clear that their intentions were what Venturi would term *riformatore*, and rather

[11] Sher, 1985, p. 33. [12] David Hume, 'My Own Life', in Miller, pp. xxxiv–xxxv.
[13] Kames, 1749, 'Introduction'. [14] Sher, 1985 and Robertson, 1984. Below, pp. 268–71.
[15] His 'Europe' was of a strictly limited extent; he once defined it as a circle with its centre at Calais and a radius of two hundred miles (Miller, p. 448). This radius would not reach Edinburgh.

certain that they did not operate as *philosophes* – if by that word be meant intellectuals operating independently, and claiming to guide society, from a power base of their own creation, consisting in opinion taking shape in a public space apart from the structures of government. This does not mean that they were unaware of their provincial status, or unresentful of English attitudes towards them; nor does it mean that they were uninterested in the work of French, Italian or German philosophers, or that these were other than deeply interested in theirs. There was a European culture of Enlightenment, and they took part in it. As historians, however, they began with what they thought central: the history of a form of government British but more English than Scottish; moving outwards to consider it in the settings provided, first by the history of Europe, second by that of civil society.

CHAPTER 17

Scotland and the progress of society

Robertson and Hume were both Scotsmen, but one cannot read Robertson's history of sixteenth-century Scotland in tandem with the second volume of Hume's Tudor history – in which the narratives covered largely the same ground – without realising that Hume was a cosmopolitan and something of an expatriate, whereas Robertson saw Scotland from within. Though the *History of England* was written for the most part while Hume was resident in Scotland and deals with Scottish affairs in detail when they present themselves, Hume includes, and therefore marginalises, Scottish history within English. Robertson makes it the centre of his attention, and yet has difficulty making it explain itself. Both the concern and the difficulty are products of his special position, and his special agenda, within Scottish politics, ecclesiastical and national, and what these were has been magisterially explained in the work of Richard B. Sher.[16] Here we encounter Robertson, as one of a group of Edinburgh clerics – others being Hugh Blair, Alexander Carlyle and Adam Ferguson – who observed with dismay the inability of the Hanoverian regime in Scotland to defend itself against the Highland Jacobite incursion of 1745–6. From this they drew two by no means congruent conclusions: the first that Scotland still had need of the martial virtue discovered in its past by the now abandoned history of George Buchanan, and there emphasised to the point where critics could say that Scottish culture had no virtue except the martial, and was therefore barbaric; the second that, in order to believe in and defend itself in the modern world, Scotland must become, and know itself to be, a polite and cultivated commercial society, such as the Union with England was intended to make it. Whether these two values, the martial and the polite, could be reconciled was to be a central problem in British Enlightened thought and necessitated the construction of some complex

[16] Sher, 1985. See further Phillipson, 1981, 1987.

historical schemes. More immediately, in the decades following the last Jacobite war, the problem came to be that of Scottish exclusion from the national militia organised by Pitt and important in the life and thought of Edward Gibbon: the militia intended to harness patriot virtue to the defence of the expanding Anglo-Hanoverian state, but as Gibbon saw, by no means free from ambiguities in the way it pursued these aims.[17]

It became a central crisis in the history of the force Robertson led in Scottish politics that in 1760 during the Seven Years War, and again in 1776 during the War of the American Revolution, the parliamentary politics of Westminster – those of an English ascendancy in both Houses and the Scottish agents of successive ministries – steadfastly refused to extend the national militia to Scotland, whose social structure the English and the Anglicised knew to be different but did not trouble much to understand.[18] This was a crisis in the Unionism of Robertson and his friends, both because it revealed to them that they were disliked and distrusted by the regime (and hated by its radical English critics) and because it destroyed their principal mechanism, originally proposed by Andrew Fletcher, for relating martial virtue to modern society. Concurrently with the rejection of the first bill for a Scottish militia in 1760, there arose the cultural and ideological crisis over the poems ascribed by James Macpherson to the Gaelic bard Ossian.[19] Macpherson's enterprise was promoted – not to say created – by the group around William Robertson, but as a means to the rediscovery of martial virtue it possessed some major disadvantages. In locating the heroic mythos in a Gaelic past, rather than in the thirteenth-century War of Independence, it raised the unsettled question whether Highland could be appropriated by Lowland culture so soon after its defeat in 1746; and the increasingly dubious authenticity of the Ossianic poems themselves proved both weakening and divisive to the Edinburgh intellectuals. It is noteworthy that while Blair, Carlyle and Ferguson held out as long as they could in Macpherson's support, their major intellectual allies – David Hume in Edinburgh and Adam Smith in Glasgow – refused to accept the poems, and that it was Smith who further declared that a modern society based on wage labour and commercial profit could afford to dispense with a militia and rely on a standing army, though to do so was not without risks.[20] In their minds, the original goals of Robertson and his associates

[17] See *EEC*, ch. 3.
[18] Sher, 1985, ch. 6, part 1, 'The Call to Arms', pp. 213–41; Robertson, 1985, chs. 4 and 5.
[19] Sher, 1985, ch. 6, part 2, 'The Call of the Highland Bard', pp. 242–61; Kidd, 1993, pp. 219–35.
[20] Campbell and Skinner, 1981, vol. II, pp. 698–708. Cf. Sher, 1985, p. 237, and n. 120 for other readings; Robertson, 1985, pp. 212–25.

had decisively broken apart, and the history of society had become both more progressive and more complex.

But there is a further, and politically more significant, narrative in which the history of Robertson and his friends has to be situated. Throughout their active lives they constituted, with Robertson as their indefatigably effective leader and organiser, what is known as the 'Moderate party' in the ecclesiastical and urban politics of the Edinburgh ministry, town council and university, and in the general assembly of the Church of Scotland.[21] 'Moderates' were those who believed that a Presbyterian clergy should be sociable and polite, versed in the literary culture of their day (including the theatre), and should be called to their clerical offices by the lay elders of the congregations, among whom a polite and propertied gentry, including patrons with inherited or acquired rights of presentment, should always be prominent.[22] Here we catch sight of the social implications and functions of politeness, and in particular of the Enlightened objective of ensuring that organised and authoritative religion should remain within and not without the fabric of human society and sociability, subject always to society's magisterial and cultural authority. It becomes possible to begin speaking of a 'Scottish Enlightenment'; and when we find that the adversaries of the 'Moderate' clergy and laity, as these extended their grip on Edinburgh ecclesiastical and academic politics, were the strongly Calvinist members of what became known as the 'Popular party', it also becomes further possible to enquire whether the 'Scottish' was a regional and late variant of the 'Arminian Enlightenment', in which criticism of the Calvinist absolute decrees developed into an erastian politics, a pursuit of polite culture, and a reputation not always undeserved for anti-Trinitarian theology. We have seen that David Hume understood the role of English Arminianism and regarded the absolute decrees as one of the sources of enthusiasm.[23] In Scotland, recent scholars hold, the Moderates avoided theological controversy by avoiding anti-Trinitarian positions, and were careful to subscribe to such statements of Calvinist orthodoxy as the Westminster Confession of Faith;[24] but having done so, they continued to avoid theological discussion, and this drew upon them the often clamorous accusation that they reduced religion to morality alone, and regarded the nature of the divine persons, and of human

[21] Their rise, and William Robertson's role, is recounted by Sher 1985, chs. 1–3.
[22] The politics of patronage in Scottish ecclesiastical life are succinctly explained by Brown, in Brown, 1997, pp. 10–15. [23] Above, pp. 212–13.
[24] I am indebted to Professor Sher for advice on this point.

communion with them, with an indifference amounting to Socinianism, Stoicism or deism.[25] As ordained clergy active in the affairs of an orthodox confession, they could not be expected to adopt heterodox positions, or to endorse Hume's outspoken *philosophe* assertion that the theological debates they avoided were utterly devoid of meaning. We are left to scrutinise what evidence there may be about their personal spirituality and – more important to the present enquiry – to ask what they had to say about religious doctrine and the workings of the human mind in religion as they constructed their major histories of human society.

In analysing Robertson's histories, as in analysing Hume's, we are concerned with the ways in which they reconciled the three components of narrative, philosophy and erudition, since it was their perceived success in doing this which won them praise for eliminating the reproach that there were no modern classical British historians. Robertson's *History of Scotland*, which is a history of the minorities and reigns of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI, down to the latter's accession to the English throne in 1603, appeared in 1759, shortly before Hume's two volumes on the history of the Tudors.[26] Robertson displayed anxiety lest he be overshadowed by Hume,[27] and to compare the two works is to notice that he makes less use of 'philosophical' history, if by that term we mean the generalisations recording changes in the distribution of land, the control of armed force, and the conduct of human manners, which were supposed to make the difference between an ancient, or a medieval, and a modern society. This is far from meaning that Robertson was indifferent to 'philosophical' changes of this sort; rather that he could not find them in the narrative of Scottish history taken by itself. The Stuart kings from James I to James V had been prevented by long minorities and early, often violent deaths from making headway against the power of the nobility; and Robertson presented a feudal order of society, uniform in all of 'Europe', as enduring throughout the sixteenth century in Scotland, whereas formidable monarchs like Louis XI, Henry VII and Ferdinand and Isabella had set about terminating it

[25] Such was the charge of the Popular satirist John Witherspoon, later an American Revolutionary and father of Princeton University. Sher, 1985, pp. 57–9, and the essays collected under the heading 'Religion and Revolution: The Two Worlds of John Witherspoon', in Sher and Smitten, 1990, pp. 29–132.
[26] *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI, till his accession to the Crown of England: with a review of the Scottish history previous to that period, and an appendix containing original papers* (London, 1759), in *Works*, vols. I and II.
[27] Sher, 1985, p. 104. For Robertson's promotion of his work before and after publication, see Smitten, in Brown, 1997, pp. 39–42.

elsewhere. This had a number of consequences. In the first place, the feudal paradigm meant that Robertson saw no point in looking even as far back in Scottish history as the reign of Malcolm Canmore, when Norman magnates and their subtenants had become established in the Lowland kingdom.[28] He did not engage in the kind of philosophical history that investigated the relations between feudalism as a 'system' and the Germanic or Celtic systems of dependence that had existed earlier, though enquiry into this question was far from unknown. He dismissed as legendary the history written by Buchanan and his predecessors without furnishing any substitute. In the second place, the history of feudal Scotland is a flat screen without tensions; he has no equivalent for Hume's baronial quasi-constitutionalism or for the replacement of feudalism proper by the great household with its bands of retainers. Robertson's view of Scottish medieval history is negative; it is devoid of the complex tensions of English history, and it is not part of the emergence of a European system of states, equipped with strategies for the conduct of interstate relations, that takes shape as the kings seize control of their kingdoms – Robertson's second paradigm for the understanding of a post-feudal Europe.[29]

As a result, the *History of Scotland* is not marked by a complex interweaving of narrative, philosophy and erudition. Scottish history does not conduct the narrative of statecraft in and out of a series of transformations in the manners of society, which require to be buttressed by a careful deployment of philological learning. Indeed, since the Scottish kingdom is failing to become a state with its own *raison d'état*, it may be doubted whether 'narrative of statecraft' is a *mot juste*; the doings of Mary, Bothwell, Murray and the rest take place in a context of baronial misconduct and little more. The Scottish Reformation, the emergence of a Protestant clergy not directed by the crown, but dependent upon and at the same time resisting a nobility bent on the spoliation of the church, furnishes one non-feudal context, and the involvement of Scotland in the dynastic politics and statecraft of the English succession furnishes another; but the effect of the latter is to return the narrative to the grand theme of the 'regiment of women', the long devious confrontation between Mary and Elizabeth which was the connecting thread of Hume's fourth volume. It is characteristic of Robertson that in summing up Elizabeth, he remarks that she deserves the praise she has received as an actor in English history, but as an actor in Scottish must be judged a

[28] *Works*, I, pp. 4–5. For the uniformity of feudal government and the kings' attacks on it, see I, pp. 31–5 and II., 61–4. [29] *Works*, I, pp. 68–72.

good deal less favourably.[30] He situates himself as author in a Scottish narrative far more unequivocally than Hume does; and what is lost to the relationship between philosophy and narrative is gained by the dramatic unfolding of the latter. It seems likely that when Gibbon contrasts 'the perfect composition, the nervous language, the well-turned periods of Dr Robertson' with 'the calm philosophy, the careless inimitable beauties' of Hume,[31] he means that the last-named are not merely stylistic, but are to be found in the interweaving of narrative text with philosophic context, and perhaps that Robertson's style, because the more ancient, is the more masculine of the two. Whether this is enough to make him *le Tacite* and Hume *le Tite-Live de l'Ecosse*[32] is more uncertain; though Tacitus's philosophy was not calm and his style certainly not feminine, he was, we must remember, the most 'philosophical' of the historians of antiquity.[33]

We look for some hint of the Moderate Robertson's history of the rise and fall of the Covenanting clergy, of which the reign of James VI might serve as an admonition, but it cannot be said that we find it. It is made clear that John Knox had no objection to seeing an order of 'superintendents' (*episcopi*) take the place of that of bishops,[34] and that unrelenting opposition to any kind of episcopacy appeared only with Andrew Melville.[35] Hume would certainly have argued that the Scottish ministers passed through a phase of enthusiasm, in which they saw their office as derived from Christ alone and wholly separated from civil magistracy, before entering on the more sober civility which the Moderates desired to see. This would have entailed a narrative of the Covenanting period and its aftermath, which Hume did not attempt in depth. Robertson ends his history in 1603, with James VI's departure to become James I and the departure of the court marking the end of all hope that written Scots could become a language of high culture;[36] he closes with a six-page disquisition on the inevitability of anglicisation, but leaves it to be inferred by way of conclusion that this was the moment when the problem of breaking the power of the nobility, unsolved by any Scottish statecraft, began to pass irrevocably out of Scottish hands. James acquired such wealth and power from his new kingdom that the barons could never think of opposing him again, but as an absentee king found it expedient to leave them their heritable

[30] *Works*, II, pp. 232–3. [31] *Memoirs*, p. 99; *EEG*, p. 120, n. 66. [32] *Letters*, II, p. 107.
[33] Above, pp. 9–10. [34] *Works*, I, p. 204.
[35] *Works*, II, pp. 45–6; Melville's attitude here is one of unnecessary suspicion rather than doctrinal conviction. Cf. pp. 113–14. [36] *Works*, II, pp. 243–8.

jurisdictions, with the result that for a century Scotland suffered from the combination of an absolute monarch with a feudal nobility. Only in the reign of Charles I did misguided religious innovation give the Scottish magnates the chance to place themselves at the head of a national rebellion; but this proved damaging to their power, which was not restored by the Restoration, was further lessened by the Revolution and was swept away for ever by the Union.[37] Robertson offers no account, even by anticipation, of the role of the kirk or the claims of the clergy in the seven decades from 1637 to 1707. Perhaps the story was too recent, too painful and too contentious in the debates between Moderate and Popular for Robertson, engaged all his life in an ecclesiastical politics of manoeuvre and manipulation, to think it prudent to attempt writing it; but the effect seems to be that we do not have a Moderate history – certainly none from the hand of Robertson – of Scotland in the seventeenth century.[38] As we shall see, he offers none of Europe either.

In 1761, a suggestion was put to Robertson that he too might attempt a history of England. It may have emanated from the circle of Lord Bute, an energetic patron of the Moderates in palace and parliamentary politics.[39] Perhaps there was a felt need of a history less defiantly irreligious than Hume's; conceivably, it had been realised that a history of England by a Scot committed to Union politics and Moderation might be more fully 'British' in its perspective. But such a history would have had to be written in Edinburgh – as Hume's had been – and the approach to Robertson seems to have been connected with a suggestion that he might move to England and another that he might accept office in the Church of England;[40] there is language in the *History of Scotland* which might suggest a willingness to accept a modified form of episcopacy.[41] Robertson declined; he was too deeply, and no doubt too sincerely, involved in the political and cultural enterprise of the Moderates to wreck it by what would have been perceived as an act of apostasy. And he was by that time engaged in writing his *History of Charles V*, which appeared in 1769 and brought him from the publishers a cash payment which few English or Scottish bishoprics could have matched.[42] Instead

[37] *Works*, II, pp. 237–41.

[38] See Kidd, 1993, pp. 191–200. Was any such history written during the Scottish Enlightenment? Sher, 1985, pp. 112–13.

[39] *Works*, I, pp. xxv–xxvi. The editor follows Dugald Stewart in suggesting that the project for a history of England was not abandoned till 1764. Robertson seems to have used it as a bargaining point in pursuing the principalship of Edinburgh University, which he attained in 1762. For a modern treatment of this negotiation see Brown, in Brown, 1997, pp. 21–3.

[40] *Works*, I, pp. xx–xxi. [41] Above, n. 34. [42] *Works*, I, pp. xviii–xix.

of following Hume[43] and viewing Scottish history in the context of a history of the English monarchy, he chose to write a history of the European states system as it took shape in the sixteenth century; a history needed for the understanding of Scottish history, in which nevertheless Scotland hardly appeared at all. Scots pride themselves on being 'European' in their thinking where the English are self-centred, but an autonomous Scottish history is as likely to disappear in a 'European' as in a 'British' context, and Robertson never returned to writing history with a Scottish centre. The red giant swallowed the white dwarf.

The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V, with a View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century occupies three volumes, III to V, of Robertson's collected works. The *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* takes up most of the first volume, and has been published separately, as a treatise in its own right.[44] It is necessary, however, to consider the work as a whole, and attend to Robertson's statement of its purpose:

> The age of Charles V may therefore be considered as the period at which the political state of Europe began to assume a new form. I have endeavoured to render my account of it, an introduction to the history of Europe subsequent to his reign,[45]

as the *View of the Progress of Society* is an introduction to the same history prior to his accession. It was a premise of the *historiens philosophes* that Enlightenment entailed the construction of a system of *états policés* which could control their internal government and their external wars, in order for the individual to live at peace and practise a commerce of goods and ideas. Voltaire had dated this construction from the *siècle de Louis XIV*, but there was a counter-thesis which located it in the successful struggle of a European alliance against the threat of French 'universal monarchy'; and British and Dutch Protestant publicists were disposed to see earlier versions of that threat in the Habsburg monarchies of Philip II and his father Charles V before him. To this in turn there was a counter-thesis dating from the Tory reversal of British policy in the four last years of Queen Anne; if the European states system rested on the Treaty of Utrecht, it consisted in a tri-polar 'balance of power' between Britain, France and the Austrian monarchy, and there was room for an admission that the pursuit of 'universal monarchy' by France, and by the Habsburgs previously, might have been exag-

[43] Hume, rather questionably, advised Robertson to give up history and write a modern equivalent of Plutarch's *Lives* instead; *Works*, I, pp. xxiii–xxiv. [44] Gilbert, 1972. [45] *Works*, III, p. 6.

gerated, and that the history of Europe since its recovery in the fifteenth century should be written as the emergence of a 'balance of power'. Robertson was emphatic that Charles V, in spite of his acquisition of monarchy over the Spanish, Burgundian and Austro-German territories and the enlargement of his empire from Cuzco to Vienna, had aimed at nothing so chimerical as 'universal monarchy',[46] and that his life had been spent in confrontation with the countervailing power of the French kings, with those of England rather ineffectively seeking a balancing role between them. Philosophically speaking, the *History of Charles V* offers the kind of history called for by Bolingbroke in the *Letters on the Study of History*; it echoes him, and also Voltaire, in proclaiming that it is with the emergence of modern statecraft that modern history begins, modern historiography begins to be written and history becomes once more worth the modern reader's attention.[47] There is another genre of historiography to which it also belongs: that dating from Rohan and Pufendorf in the previous century, in which publicists and journalists had offered gazettes of Europe in terms of the interests of its several states, and histories of Europe in terms of the formation and interaction of those states and interests.[48] And Robertson dedicates the work to none other than King George III, significantly observing:

> History claims it as her prerogative to offer instruction to kings, as well as to their people. What reflections the Reign of the Emperor Charles V may suggest to your Majesty, it becomes not me to conjecture. But your subjects cannot observe the various calamities, which that monarch's ambition to be distinguished as a conqueror, brought upon his dominions, without recollecting the felicity of their own times, and looking up with gratitude to their Sovereign, who, during the fervour of youth, and amidst the career of victory, possessed such self-command, and maturity of judgment, as to set bounds to his own triumphs, and prefer the blessings of peace to the splendour of military glory.[49]

Robertson praises the king for having held back, between 1760 and 1763, from the pursuit of too great an empire in the Americas and hegemony in Germany and Europe; in avoiding the errors of Charles V, George III preserved a Europe of balanced forces. Nevertheless, we have entered the world after the Seven Years War, in which the authors of the *Histoire des Deux Indes* could call for a European alliance against a British universal monarchy of the seas and the Europe of the Treaty of Utrecht had exploded into the clash of empires west of the Atlantic and

[46] *Works*, v, p. 386. [47] *Works*, III, pp. 5–6.
[48] Meinecke, 1972a and b, 1957; Abbatista, 1990, for a study of the London Scot John Campbell working in this vein. [49] *Works*, III, pp. 3–4.

east of the Oder. Robertson aims at a history which will teach Europe to maintain its superiority by limiting its ambitions. It will be a Eurocentric history, he warns his readers, because though the reign of Charles V directs our attention to the conquest of the Americas, the encounter between pre-Columbian and European manners is so vast and strange a subject that it must be reserved for another book.[50] His *History of America* did not appear till 1778, and then in incomplete form; it was to be a mainly philosophical history, in which the narrative of manners did not interact significantly with a narrative of statecraft. The *History of Charles V* carried European manners to the point where a narrative of the latter sort became possible, and did not join the *Histoire des Deux Indes* in asking, but not answering, the question whether the New World had destroyed and corrupted the balance of the Old. The *View of the Progress of Society*, with which it opens, is a history of Europe since the fall of the last civilisation in which polite and classical narrative of human actions had been possible.

In this it resembles the *Essai sur les moeurs*, but Robertson concludes the critical dissertations appended to it by explaining why

> I have not once mentioned M. de Voltaire, who, in his *Essai sur l'Histoire Generale*, has reviewed the same period, and has treated of all these subjects. This does not proceed from inattention to the works of that extraordinary man, whose genius, no less enterprising than universal, has attempted almost every different species of literary composition . . . But as he seldom imitates the example of modern historians in citing the authors from whom they derived their information, I could not, with propriety, appeal to his authority in confirmation of any doubtful or unknown fact. I have often, however, followed him as my guide in these researches; and he has not only pointed out the facts with respect to which it was of importance to inquire, but the conclusions which it was proper to draw from them. If he had, at the same time, mentioned the books which relate these particulars, a great part of my labour would have been unnecessary, and many of his readers, who now consider him only as an entertaining and lively writer, would find that he is a learned and well-informed historian.[51]

Voltaire injures chiefly himself by his failure to act as a colleague in the republic of letters, and Robertson does not echo Gibbon's judgment that because he is indifferent he is frequently careless and inaccurate. But philosophy has need of erudition, and both must be integrated with narrative. When we read the *View of the Progress of Society* as a work in its own right, we have to bear in mind its relation to the twelve books of

[50] *Works*, III, pp. 7–8. [51] *Works*, III, p. 315.

narrative history that are to follow. It is an introduction, of the same family as the digressions inserted in the text and the footnotes and endnotes appended to it; the narrative cannot be read as if these disquisitions did not exist; and we are considering the literary and typographic organisation of the relations between narrative, philosophy and erudition. In the *History of Scotland,* where there were few patterns of cultural change for the philosophic historian to recount, the problem of erudition was simpler. At the end of the narrative, Robertson appended a fifty-page dissertation on Mary's possible complicity in the murder of her husband, and a collection three times as long of Scottish and English state papers;[52] these were the materials of a history of modern statecraft (or the lack of it). In the *History of Charles V,* the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* is a philosophical history, conducting that progress to the point where a transformation of manners has made possible a statecraft of which a history can be written. The philosophical generalisations of which it consists are supported and refined by forty-five 'proofs and illustrations'[53] marshalling and evaluating the antiquarian evidence on which the history rests. The narrative of the actions of state performed by Charles and his contemporaries can now proceed; the historical context which makes it possible has been established. There will be digressions, as the action passes through further contexts needing explanation or elaboration; but though there are footnotes, in which Robertson identifies the historians, or more rarely the archives, which authorise his statements, there are no further exercises in the discourse of erudition. These seem associated with the kind of historiography we are calling 'philosophical'.

The *View of the Progress of Society* is a history of the entity known as 'Europe' over the course of the Christian millennium, from the fifth century, when the sons of Theodosius lost control over the Latin provinces of the Roman empire, to the beginning of the sixteenth, when Charles V came into his inheritances and began to act in the states system of Europe which was then taking shape. That millennium was the theme, or rather the anti-thesis, of all Enlightened historians looking for the preconditions of modernity, and since Robertson was one of these, we need to compare his treatment with those of others. There is the premise that once classical civilisation and its history have been lost, the metanarrative must reach the point where human actions can once more be narrated in neo-classical styles; and this is linked with the

[52] *Works,* II, pp. 249–302 ('A Critical Dissertation concerning the Murder of King Henry'), 303–448 ('Appendix'). [53] *Works,* III, pp. 185–316.

distinction between history that merely satisfies curiosity and history that is necessary and useful in other ways.[54] There is the premise that European barbarism has its own preconditions and is linked with the decline and fall of the Roman empire. As the Romans extended their power beyond their own peninsula, over Spain, Gaul, Britain, the German and Danubian provinces, they conquered and destroyed many barbarian nations, bringing them lettered civilisation while depriving them of their military virtue.

> Two great revolutions have happened in the political state and in the manners of the European nations. The first was occasioned by the progress of the Roman power; the second by the subversion of it.[55]

Robertson does not seem to suggest that he is living in, or writing the history of, a third.

> The Romans having thus desolated Europe, set themselves to civilise it . . . Europe began to breathe, and recover strength after the calamities which it had undergone.[56]

Robertson is writing of 'Europe' as an entity aboriginally existing and capable of supporting the organic analogy; but the Roman Europe was incapable of enduring. 'The dominion of the Romans, like that of all great empires, degraded and debased the human species';[57] the former barbarians could not support their own cultures or defend themselves – the shock of 1745 may be felt here – against the new barbarians moving out of Germany, Sarmatia and Scythia;[58] the virtue of the Roman emperors and legions corrupted itself; and the second barbarism overwhelmed and occupied Europe, with an accompanying genocide of which Robertson makes a great deal.[59] In language which Gibbon was to echo and invert, he says:

> If a man were called to fix upon the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race
>
> – 'Europe' has now become the globe –
>
> was most calamitous and afflicted, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Theodosius the Great, to the establishment of the Lombards in Italy.[60]

The years 295 to 571 form a nadir.

[54] *Works,* III, pp. 5–6. [55] *Works,* III, p. 9.
[56] *Works,* III, p. 10. Since it could never be suggested that Romans 'civilised' Greeks, this is a 'Europe' transalpine and barbaric, Celtic and Germanic. [57] *Works,* III, p. 11. [58] *Ibid.*
[59] *Works,*III, pp. 13–14, 16–18; also notes IV and V, pp. 186–92. [60] *Works,* III, p. 17.

But, according to the observation of an elegant and profound historian, there is an ultimate point of depression, as well as exaltation, from which human affairs naturally return in a contrary progress, and beyond which they never pass either in their advancement or decline.[61]

Hume is being quoted,[62] and we observe that the cyclical view of history is by no means extinct among the moderns. Its effect for both the Scots historians, moreover, is that the Christian millennium is by no means an unrelieved darkness of barbarism and religion, and the five centuries we term 'medieval' are in many respects a period of recovery and creative preparation for the age of Charles V. The eleventh century, by which time feudal government – and, Hume had added, papal jurisdiction – had become uniform and universal in 'Europe', was a second nadir of the sort just described, from which 'we may date the return of government and manners in a contrary direction';[63] but since Robertson is concerned with causes and effects, he must locate some of the impulses towards recovery in the feudal government itself. In the text, he examines its origins as lying in the uncivilised freedom of the barbarous nations,[64] but in a series of important appendices[65] he traces a movement through allodial to feudal tenures, and in the barbarian jurisprudence accompanying both, and makes it clear that the origins of liberty, in so far as they centre around the figure of the *liber homo*, whose tenure is protected as property by the law, are barbaric, German and feudal. It is a problem why they have not developed among the hunting peoples of North America, whose manners are so like those of the ancient Germans; probably the explanation is that the latter 'were not unacquainted with agriculture'.[66] We are at a point where the roots of European civility are to be found in the movement of hunters and shepherds into agrarian tillage. Robertson is a modernist, who holds that a free society must be a commercial society; but agriculture is the precondition of commerce, and for this reason notions of Gothic liberty and ancient constitutions can never be quite given up.

From this point the first chapter (called a 'section') of the *View of the Progress of Society* traces the recovery of 'Europe' from the second nadir of the second barbarism 'with respect to interior government, laws and manners'.[67] Recovery is to be achieved, as far as possible, by forces originating within feudal society, but the narrative begins with that society's first major encounter with a world outside itself: its great foray

[61] *Works*, III, p. 27. [62] Above, p. 253. [63] *Works*, III, p. 28.
[64] *Works*, III, pp. 19–23; also note VI, pp. 192–6. [65] *Works*, III, notes VI–IX, pp. 192–209.
[66] *Works*, III, pp. 194–6. [67] *Works*, III, p. 9.

against Greek and Muslim civilisation, known as the Crusades. Voltaire, Hume and Raynal all treated this episode as marking a low point of feudal superstition and barbarism, but not without some positive results; Robertson makes these a turning point in medieval history. The Crusades not only encouraged feudal lords to borrow money and Italian coastal cities to engage in commerce;[68] they encouraged the growth of royal jurisdiction and above all the incorporation of towns, which combined with the long history of allodial and feudal tenures to add a *bourgeois* to an agrarian conception of liberty.[69] Estates began to be formed, and both kings extending their jurisdiction and barons asserting their privileges found it to their interest to enfranchise servile tenants and include burgesses in their councils.[70] The history of Europe begins to be a history of liberty, differentiating it from other civilisations, and the origins of liberty are complex and idiosyncratically European. It could not have developed without an accompanying development of public law, and the narrative proceeds to a long account of how the horrors of the *leges barbarorum* – trial by ordeal, judicial combat, private war – gave place to territorial jurisdictions administering legal systems whose comprehensiveness made them approach a species of equity.[71] With law go manners; the Crusades bring travel, commerce and a first refinement of feudal brutality, and have much to do with the later appearance of chivalry.[72]

In this process the kings play one part and the cities another; a third role is that of the church. A signal absence from Robertson's narrative is that of the familiar and by now expected polemic – originally Protestant and subsequently *philosophe* in character – against the papal and clerical claim to an independent spiritual jurisdiction, and against the false theology and essentialist philosophy on which it was founded. This claim had been Voltaire's *infâme*, and all the Enlightened historians we have so far considered had made it an independently operating cause of the chronic medieval disorder; barbarism and religion were distinguishably originating forces, operating to reinforce one another Robertson, a Protestant, a Moderate, an Enlightened Christian perhaps indifferent to theology and working to bring the clergy within the disciplines of politeness, could not be unaware of this rhetoric and it can of course be found in his text. But he nowhere treats clericalism as an

[68] *Works*, III, pp. 31–6. [69] *Works*, III, pp. 36–9. [70] *Works*, III, pp. 39–46.
[71] *Works*, III, pp. 47–65.
[72] *Works*, III, pp. 72–4, and 267 (note XXVII). Robertson says here that he has relied entirely on La Curne de Sainte Palaye.

independently operating enemy. Superstition in religion is an effect of barbarism in society;[73] its history is subordinate to the history of manners, and there is no suggestion that the Crusades were preached by the popes for the same reason as the doctrine of clerical celibacy, to give themselves spiritual power over civil society. When we hear of the plenitude of papal authority, it is contained within a context not altogether of its own making. In common with Hume, Robertson emphasises that the clergy with all their faults possessed – if they monopolised – letters, and that letters traverse territorial space and aid in its civil organisation.[74] It is therefore significant that it was they who rediscovered the Pandects and put Roman law at the service of European recovery,[75] and if they perverted much of it into canon law which authorised the jurisdiction of spiritual courts, even this was not an unmixed evil.

> If we consider the canon law politically, and view it either as a system framed on purpose to assist the clergy in usurping powers and jurisdiction no less repugnant to the nature of their function, than inconsistent with the order of government; or, as the chief instrument in establishing the dominion of the popes, which shook the throne, and endangered the liberties of every kingdom in Europe, we must pronounce it one of the most formidable engines ever formed against the happiness of civil society. But if we contemplate it merely as a code of laws respecting the rights and property of individuals, and attend only to the civil effects of its decisions concerning these, it will appear in a different and a much more favourable light . . .[76]
>
> Many of the regulations, now deemed the barriers of personal security, or the safeguards of private property, are contrary to the spirit, and repugnant to the maxims of the civil jurisprudence known in Europe during several centuries, and were borrowed from the rules and practice of the ecclesiastical courts. By observing the wisdom and equity of the decisions in these courts, men began to perceive the necessity either of deserting the martial tribunals of the barons, or of attempting to reform them.[77]

Robertson indicates in an appendix that he has in mind the role of canon law in initiating a law of debt and a law of testamentary disposition.[78] In English historiography it was a commonplace that the capacity to place one's land in trust and devise it by will and testament had been a chief means of emancipating vassals and ending baronial power. But we seem here to be looking at something larger: a Moderate strategy for rewriting the history of the clergy. By placing their history within the history of civil society and manners, it was possible simultaneously to

[73] *Works*, III, pp. 25–6. [74] *Works*, III, p. 67. [75] *Works*, III, p. 69, and n. xxv, pp. 264–6.
[76] *Works*, III, pp. 65–6. [77] *Works*, III, p. 68.
[78] *Works*, III, note XXIV, and III, pp. 261–4, esp. 263.

emphasise and de-emphasise the threat which clericalist and papalist claims had once presented to the latter history's very existence. Even as the clergy challenged the foundations of civil society, they were helping to reinforce these foundations, and preparing the day when their history could be written as that of what the Moderates were working to make them: agents of civil society, whose religion enhanced its disciplines and existed within them. In writing such a history, Robertson was able to avoid the thorny question of theology and disputation, and whether these had not operated of themselves to place the clergy outside civil society and give their authority an independent foundation; he need not write a history which avowedly attacked the intellectual foundations of Christian culture. It was a very Moderate strategy to avoid disputation, even against disputation itself; he simply chose to treat the clergy as having always been what he desired them to be, whether they had known it or not. In some ways this vastly enriched his historiographic argument, enabling him to show medieval society as a complex system which engendered its own transformation; in others it impoverished it. He had chosen to avoid the history of theology and dogma; his decision to write a history of manners – what we should term a social history – tended to preclude the great struggles between the medieval power systems, papacy, empire and French monarchy; and he did not use – clearly he preferred not to – Hume's analysis of the workings of the religious mind into an unending alternation between superstition and enthusiasm. Peter the Hermit is the sole enthusiast to appear in this section, and he is a transitory phenomenon.[79] There is no underground history of heresy as the invisible church.

Scholastic thinking can be considered as a cultural disaster, but it is the effect of a series of historical accidents. Barbarians should be poets before they become philosophers, but

> unhappily for literature,
>
> (note the opening move of including religion within *belles-lettres*)
>
> our ancestors, deviating from this course which nature points out, plunged at once into the depths of abstruse and metaphysical inquiry. They had been converted to the Christian faith, soon after they settled in their new conquests. But they did not receive it pure. The presumption of men had added to the simple and instructive doctrines of Christianity the theories of a vain philosophy, that attempted to penetrate into mysteries, and to decide questions which the limited faculties of the human mind are unable to comprehend or to resolve.[80]

[79] *Works*, III, p. 30. [80] *Works*, III, p. 76.

Here we have the Enlightened case against Christian theology, a case which might be brought by Arminian or Socinian, deist or sceptic; Robertson does not state his position, or enquire into the state of Pauline Christianity before Hellenic philosophy appeared to corrupt it. He has no intention of turning in that direction, but moves onward in time to inform us that:

> Most of the persons who attempted to revive literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, had received instruction, or derived their principles of science from the Greeks in the eastern empire, or from the Arabians in Spain and Africa. Both these people[s], acute and inquisitive to excess, had corrupted those sciences which they cultivated. The former rendered theology a system of speculative refinement, or of endless controversy. The latter communicated to philosophy a spirit of metaphysical and frivolous subtlety.[81] Misled by these guides, the persons who first applied to science were involved in a maze of intricate inquiries. Instead of allowing their fancy to take its natural range, and to produce such works of invention as might have improved their taste, and refined their sentiments; instead of cultivating those arts which embellish human life, and render it comfortable; they were fettered by authority, they were led astray by example, and wasted the whole force of their genius in speculations as unavailing as they were difficult.[82]

John Witherspoon doubtless enquired with acerbity whether rendering human life comfortable was all that religion was meant to achieve; but Robertson's reduction of theology to culture enabled him to point out that scholastic philosophy was not an unmixed evil. It produced an immense explosion of intellectual activity; new social organisations, and new modes of non-feudal authority – it is the Principal of Edinburgh University who is speaking – appeared dedicated to its exercise;[83] and this enlargement and diversification of the faculties made the mind more conscious of its powers, and seems to have been connected with the growth of European commerce, an account of which closes the chapter.[84]

Robertson had laid some important foundations for the writing of Western medieval history – his 'Europe' is of course wholly a Latin construction – and these were to be of political as well as historiographical significance. In particular, his demonstration that clerical learning and aristocratic chivalry had played their part in the creation of modern manners was to be taken up into Edmund Burke's argument that the third estate could not overthrow the first and second without destroying

[81] Robertson does not name his source for this view of Arabic learning.
[82] *Works*, III, pp. 77–8. [83] *Works*, III, p. 77. [84] *Works*, III, pp. 79–83.

its own historical and cultural foundations.[85] From section I, which examines the progress of society with respect to government, laws and manners, we proceed to sections II, written 'with respect to the command of the national force requisite in foreign operations', and III, 'a view of the political constitution of the principal states of Europe at the commencement of the sixteenth century'. This is not a simple turn to the *primat der Aussenpolitik*; laws, manners and commerce cannot thrive without the protection of civil government, and the state cannot thrive unless it can exercise power over its external environment. Since this must be shared with other armed states, there must be a states system with its own *raison d'état*; and only when there is one can Europe form a single civilisation held together by a commerce in goods and manners. National sovereignty is the precondition of cosmopolitanism. The state cannot play its part in the making of civilisation without a 'national force requisite in foreign operations', and here is the reason why Robertson's generation organised their understanding of history around the growth of the standing army. This is the theme of section II, less than half the length of its predecessor. The French kings, Charles VII and Louis XI, are credited with the invention of the first bodies of troops kept in being by taxation in time of peace, an invention hastily copied by the kings of England, Aragon and Castile, but not – Robertson's silence reminds us – of Scotland;[86] and two consequences rapidly follow. Louis XI's success at browbeating and bribing the assemblies of estates into conniving at his taxation raises the issue of whether national armies are to be maintained by monarchies absolute or constitutional;[87] and his failure to secure the Burgundian inheritance leaves it to fall under Austro-Spanish control,[88] opening the way to the monarchy of Charles V and the great bipolar contest between Habsburg and Valois which furnishes the narrative of sixteenth-century history. The narrative of statecraft – the often irresponsible and hubristic conduct by kings of their new and enormous power – has now to co-exist with the narrative of manners: the progress of society to which the European states system, however amorally conducted, is a necessary precondition.

The French *chevauchée* through Italy in 1494, and the Spanish reactions it called forth, is a significant moment in this new history, and was long considered a starting point of 'modern history' in quite a recent sense. Robertson observes, however, that the armies involved were small by the standards of his own time,[89] and we are reminded that the

[85] Pocock, 1987b, pp. 69–70. [86] *Works*, III, pp. 92–5, 101–3. [87] *Works*, III, pp. 100–1.
[88] *Works*, III, pp. 103–6. [89] *Works*, III, p. 108.

'standing armies' transforming history are still unstable compositions of *gens d'armes* and mercenaries, hastily raised on short-term contracts and likely to resort to mutiny and living at free quarter when unpaid, as throughout the reign of Charles V they all too commonly are and do. They are far removed from the standing armies of 1700 and after, permanent arms of states organised to maintain and pay them in perpetuity, and this lends point to the fifteenth-century intervention of the Swiss, a republic of mercenaries who contrive to send out formidable armies without the assistance of royal jurisdiction or royal manners.[90] The anomaly lends point in turn to section III, which examines 'the principal states of Europe' – states are maintained by sovereign rulers and the Swiss are not included – as they become capable of taking part in the system of states, but are still intelligible only in terms of their interior government or 'constitution'.[91] The evolution of each needs separate treatment; states have histories, which they create but of which they are the products. History cannot be written without them.

The survey begins in Italy – we must beware of supposing that Robertson thinks the states system of that peninsula a microcosm of that of Europe as a whole – and the first power to which attention is paid there is that of the Pope. We encounter again Robertson's practice of contextualising ecclesiastical history within civil. There is an eloquent passage on the terrifying power of the spiritual jurisdiction assumed by the Popes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries:

> There was not a state in Europe which had not been disquieted by their ambition. There was not a throne, which they had not shaken; nor a prince, who did not tremble at their power.

But:

> Nothing was wanting to render this empire absolute, and to establish it on the ruins of all civil authority, but that the popes should have possessed such a degree of temporal power, as was sufficient to second and enforce their spiritual decrees. Happily for mankind, at the time when their spiritual jurisdiction was most extensive and most revered, their secular dominion was extremely limited.[92]

Robertson goes on to describe the limited extent and jurisdictional weaknesses of the papal state, and it is clear that he is depicting the age of Gregory VII no less than of Alexander VI. The papacy is always situated within the history of how barbarous principalities have evolved

[90] *Works*, III, pp. 112–13.
[91] *Works*, III, pp. 120–1. Section I is of 84 pages, II of 35, III of 50. [92] *Works*, III, p. 123.

into monarchical states, and he is bypassing the suggestion so often made – by Giannone through experience, by Voltaire through conviction, by Hume through philosophy – that the spiritual power had to be overthrown before the secular state was even possible. He is disarming *l'infâme* by writing history in a way that diminishes it. Later in the chapter, Gregory VII is depicted as the formidable politician he was, and Henry IV's humiliation at Canossa is dramatised;[93] but all the Pope is doing is exploiting the independent power of the German princes, nobles and ecclesiastics, and the incident takes place within the ongoing history of the empire rather than of Europe. German history ranks equal with French or Spanish – Robertson has elsewhere indicated that he omits English because his readers already know it[94] – and the history of Europe is becoming the history of its major states and the feudal-barbaric background out of which they emerge.

That of Spain is perhaps the hardest to understand, because – it is a Scottish historian writing – the growth of centralised royal jurisdiction and a common law is hard to find, and on the premise that feudal society was everywhere the same, Robertson finds himself saying that the Iberian kingdoms were representative of a European norm because they had escaped the progress of European society.[95] The survival of Vandalic–Gothic feudalism is accounted for by supposing that Muslim rule had left it untouched.

> The followers of Mahomet are the only enthusiasts who have united the spirit of toleration with zeal for making proselytes, and who, at the same time that they took arms to propagate the doctrine of their prophet, permitted such as would not embrace it, to adhere to their own tenets, and to practice their own rites. To this peculiarity in the genius of the Mahometan religion, as well as to the desire which the Moors had of reconciling the Christians to their yoke, it was owing that the ancient manners and laws in Spain survived the violent shock of a conquest, and were permitted to subsist, notwithstanding the introduction of a new religion and a new form of government into that country. It is obvious, from all these particulars, that the Christians must have found it extremely easy to re-establish manners and government on their ancient foundations, in those provinces of Spain which they wrested successively from the Moors.[96]

Robertson's problem is that Spanish monarchy does not resemble French or English in its strategies of state-building, and he is representing Castile and Aragon as still in a purely feudal condition. The circumstance that he knew no Arabic social structure founded on the

[93] *Works*, III, pp. 168–9. [94] *Works*, III, pp. 315–16 (note XLV). [95] *Works*, III, pp. 140, 142.
[96] *Works*, III, p. 143.

sharia to have survived in formerly Muslim Spain gives him an opportunity to support his interpretation of the history of the Christian kingdoms; he has no insight into the history of Islam, and the Ottoman monarchy – the only other Muslim state he describes – is founded not on Koranic tolerance, but on Asian despotism set forth in full Oriental detail.[97] In Spain, meanwhile, the liberties of a feudal baronage are reinforced by those of a proliferation of free cities, so that both forms of European liberty exist together.[98] Unlike those of England under the Stuarts, the liberties of Spain are defeated by Charles V in the War of the Communes,[99] but the formation of an absolute monarchy may carry us beyond the limits of his reign. Suleiman the Magnificent is almost, but never quite, one of the great princes of Europe, and the confrontation of Spanish with Turkish monarchy rounds out the *View of the Progress of Society*'s depiction of the European states system.

[97] *Works*, III, pp. 178–84, 311–15 (notes XLII–XLV). [98] *Works*, III, pp. 149, 152–3.
[99] Works, IV, pp. 97–116; p. 98 for the comparison with England.

CHAPTER 18

The Reign of Charles V *and the emergence of the European states*

Twelve books of narrative ensue, constituting the 'history' of the reign of Charles V. We are concerned with how narrative, philosophy and erudition went together to constitute 'history' in a larger sense, and we are aware that narrative occupied a position in the neo-classical mind which it does not hold for us. It was a narrative of the deeds of rulers, it occurred in the domain of state, it was recounted as exemplary in both a positive and a negative sense, it had its own stylistic conventions, and a 'historian' such as Robertson was expected to follow, though not uncritically, the narratives of those 'historians' who were accepted as authoritative. It would therefore be easy for us to dismiss or marginalise it as 'conventional' or 'traditional'; but to do so would mark a failure of historical understanding. Robertson wrote the narrative of actions performed by Charles V, Francis I and their fellow princes with a specific historical purpose: that of showing that Europe now possessed a system of states, in which actions of this kind could be performed and histories of this kind could be written; and, like Voltaire, he had written a prehistory of how the conditions necessary to this historical and historiographical state of things had been achieved. The reign of Charles V, he pronounced, marked the moment of that achievement, and introduced the history of Europe since that time.[100] But Charles was the beneficiary of the progress of society, not its author; the 'reign of Charles V' was less of a panegyric than the 'siècle de Louis XIV'. His moment in history, furthermore, was one at which the states of Europe formed such a system that actions in any one had effects for all the others, and princes could not foresee the effects of their own initiatives.[101] Reason of state governed their actions, and since this was an imperfect instrument the historiography it required was Tacitean. If the court historian Paolo Giovio is one of Robertson's authorities, another is Francesco Guicciar-

[100] Above, p. 275, n. 45. [101] *Works*, III, pp. 6, 88–9.

dini; and conversely, against Paolo Sarpi's more than Tacitean history of the Council of Trent, he weighs the Jesuit and curial counter-history written by Sforza Pallavicino.[102] And if Robertson is critical of his authors, his narrative is critical of its actors. The theme is how Charles and Francis conducted the politics of a bipolar hegemony, sometimes with prudence but sometimes to excess; the catastrophe tells how Charles, after his victory over the German Protestants, attempted an absolute rule over the Empire, was unexpectedly undone and subjected to peripeteia at the Machiavellian[103] hands of Maurice of Saxony, accepted that there must be limits to his ambitions, abdicated and retired to a monastery. Thereafter the history of the European states entered a new phase.

Narrative has now become macronarrative, the history of systemic change in European politics, and at the same time metanarrative, the history of how modern 'philosophic' narrative has become possible. In an essay on 'Robertson's place in the development of eighteenth-century narrative history',[104] Karen O'Brien has stated that 'Robertson was a fertile inventor of narrative strategies for conflict elimination', as if the function of narrative were to bring conflicts to an end by the mere act of supplying an end to their narration. This would seem to require that the narrative reaches an end in which the conflict is resolved. Robertson, it is true, declined to write the history of British America because the narrative had arrived at no such resolution, but the beginning of the new history of an independent United States.[105] But this of itself implied that there were narratives which ended in new narratives, not the end of old; and it was a literary possibility to close a narrative by indicating that there was more to tell, but that some other must tell it. We may find Robertson doing this, and it may mean that he had other ends in view than conflict elimination; the hegemonic intentions of actors in the past may, like everything else, be overstated. Perhaps the true aim of the new narrative was to reach a point where narrative became possible and conflicts in the past could be philosophically understood. If this was his aim, however, Robertson came to break off all his narratives at points in the past situated at a philosophic distance; none of his histories travel further than the year 1603, and philosophic

[102] These statements may be justified by a scanning of Robertson's footnotes, which will also convey the breadth of his command of the modern historians. For his judgment on the historians of Trent, see below, n. 110.

[103] This adjective, however appropriate, is never employed by Robertson.

[104] Brown, 1997, pp. 74–91; the words quoted at p. 75. See the review essay by Daniele Francesconi, *Storia della Storiografia*, 33 (1998), pp. 89–95. [105] Smitten, in Brown, 1997, p. 47.

history formed the habit of never arriving at the conflict-ridden present. The preconditions of the present were reached by Hume, breaking off in 1688; Robertson observed a greater caution.

The narrative, then, occurs in the context provided by the history of the states, but there is also the history of manners to accompany it. Charles and Francis were in the habit of challenging one another to single combat, though none ever took place, and Robertson observes that they were figures in transition between two codes, that of chivalry – which had replaced the barbarous custom of judicial combat – and that of the duel. The spread of the latter, encouraged by their example, had many fatal and deplorable consequences, and yet it has played a beneficial part in making European manners as delicate and punctilious as they have since become.[106] In a court culture, manners and state generate one another, and Robertson therefore carries the history of manners only so far as they can be seen reinforcing the plural system of European states. His history contains no figure as dominant as Voltaire's Louis XIV, whose court extends a new style of manners to the whole of Europe. And the circumstance that Charles is launched into fatal excess by his victory in a war of religion means that the narrative has entered a new context, and that we must return to the question of whether, why and how Robertson subjected the history of the church to the history of manners and states.

Since the German Reformation initiated by Martin Luther

> produced a revolution in the sentiments of mankind, the greatest, as well as the most beneficial, that has happened since the publication of Christianity, not only the events which at first gave birth to such opinions, but the causes which rendered their progress so rapid and successful, deserve to be considered with minute attention.[107]

In 1750 Robertson had delivered and published a sermon on *The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance and its Connection with the Success of His Religion Considered.*[108] He had considered the historical condition of the Roman world under Augustus and Tiberius, and had reviewed all the secular causes that might account for the spread of Christianity thereafter. This, he said, did not belong in the province of sacred history, in which the very actions and words of God might be discerned, but in that of a history at once civil and providential.

[106] *Works*, IV, pp. 223–4. [107] *Works*, IV, p. 12.

[108] Gilbert, 1972, p. xvii. It is not reprinted among his *Works* of 1824. See now Phillipson, in Brown, 1997, pp. 55–73.

Careful observers may often by the light of reason form probable conjectures with regard to the plan of God's providence, and can discover a skillful hand directing the revolutions of human affairs, encompassing the best ends by the most effectual and surprising means.[109]

Though anything but new in the tradition of Christian rhetoric, the appeal to providence, in the hands of a historian as skilled as Robertson, was a powerful weapon. The ways of providence were past finding out; the depth of God's wisdom, and the cunning of his reason, were capable of turning any material to his purposes; and the historian might assemble all that could be said concerning the *arcana imperii*, the mysteries of the human heart, the law of unintended consequences and the crooked timber of humanity, and then invite his readers to acknowledge the inscrutable goodness of God's purposes. Providence was almost God's reason of state. Certainly, the end must be recognisable and approved; concerning the historians of the Council of Trent Robertson observed:

But whichsoever of these authors an intelligent person takes for his guide, in forming a judgment concerning the spirit of the council, he must discover so much ambition as well as artifice among some of the members, so much ignorance and corruption among others; he must observe such a large infusion of human policy and passions, mingled with such a scanty portion of that simplicity of heart, sanctity of manners, and love of truth, which alone qualify men to determine what doctrines are worthy of God, and what worship is acceptable to him; that he will find it no easy matter to believe, that any extraordinary influence of the Holy Ghost hovered over this assembly, and dictated its decrees.[110]

A Protestant reader was not going to believe that anyway, least of all with Sarpi before him; but the fathers of Trent had made some claim to the Holy Spirit's special presence in their council, and had repeated their claim in an inscription.[111] The German reformers had not done this, to the extent that they had never met in a council said to be that of the church universal and had even held that a general council could err; and for that reason their claim could be to providential direction, not to formal spiritual authorisation. It could therefore be said on their behalf, as could not be said of Trent, that any worldly considerations, any weakness or wickedness of human behaviour, that might appear in their conduct, could have been turned by providence to the ends intended by

[109] Gilbert 1972, p. xvii. [110] *Works*, v, p. 228.
[111] *Postremum spiritus sanctus oracula effudit*, said to have been engraved on the wall of Santa Maria Maggiore at Trento. And yet the word *oracula* is humanist and pagan.

God and were evidence of his favour. The full resources of the historian's craft could be placed at this argument's disposal.

To overturn a system of religious belief, founded on ancient and deep-rooted prejudices, supported by power, and defended with no less art than industry; to establish in its room doctrines of the most contrary genius and tendency; and to accomplish all this, not by external violence or the power of arms, are operations which historians, the least prone to credulity and superstition, ascribe to that Divine Providence, which, with infinite ease, can bring about events which to human sagacity appear impossible. The interposition of Heaven in favour of the Christian religion, at its first publication, was manifested by miracles and prophecies wrought and uttered in confirmation of it. Though none of the reformers possessed, or pretended to possess, these supernatural gifts; yet that wonderful preparation of circumstances, which disposed the minds of men for receiving their doctrines, that singular combination of causes, which secured their success, and enabled men destitute of power and policy to triumph over those who employed against them extraordinary efforts of both, may be considered as no slight proof that the same hand which planted the Christian religion, protected the reformed faith, and reared it, from beginnings extremely feeble, to an amazing degree of vigour and maturity.[112]

The role of prophecy and miracle in authorising and disseminating the primitive gospel had caused Gibbon great trouble in youth when he read Conyers Middleton, and was to cause him more when he wrote his chapters on early Christian history; for the believer was required to believe in them, and to reject miracle was to reject Christ's authority and person. Gibbon both rejected miracle and omitted providence from his account of the causes of the spread of Christianity. But the Reformers depicted by Robertson made no claim to be acting in sacred as opposed to civil history, and made no claim to authority more extraordinary than that of providence; all civil history could therefore be represented as the instrument of providence, and

it was from causes seemingly fortuitous, and from a source very inconsiderable, that all the mighty effects of the Reformation flowed.[113]

Leo X, being in need of money, floated the sale of indulgences and a monk named Martin Luther was moved to protest. One thing led to another, and Leo, 'a stranger to theological controversies, and apt to despise them'[114] – Robertson does not share Hume's artless belief that his pontificate might have been the moment at which Rome abandoned Christian theology altogether[115] – allowed the matter to be handled without 'that profound sagacity [or] that steady perseverance, which

[112] *Works*, IV, p. 12. [113] *Ibid.* [114] *Works*, IV, p. 20. [115] Above, p. 227.

had long rendered [the court of Rome] the most perfect model of political wisdom to the rest of Europe'.[116] The Lord had hardened Pharaoh's heart; the Curia, attentive only to affairs of state, did not recognise that in Luther it had to do with a revolution in – what? opinion? manners? spirituality? Luther himself is the opposite of the enthusiast Hume (and later Gibbon) saw in him; he is led from one step to another until he denies the whole edifice opposed to him.[117] But there ensues a digression,[118] in which Robertson traces both the unlimited appetite of clerical claims and the slow growth of opposition to them, emphasising the importance of the civil magistrate under feudal conditions, but choosing to say more about the revival of critical learning and less than we might expect about the recovery of civil authority; it is as if he were not yet ready to present the various Reformations as a series of acts of state. He concludes:

> I have avoided entering into any discussion of the theological doctrines of Popery, and have not attempted to shew how repugnant they are to the spirit of Christianity, and how destitute of any foundation in reason, in the word of God, or in the practice of the primitive church, leaving those topics entirely to ecclesiastical historians, to whose province they peculiarly belong,

so that Robertson, defining himself as a civil historian, does not tell us what ecclesiastical historians he has in mind.

> But when we add the effect of these religious considerations to the influence of political causes, it is obvious that the united operation of both on the human mind must have been sudden and irresistible . . . it is evident, that the success of the Reformation was the natural effect of many powerful causes prepared by peculiar Providence, and happily conspiring to that end. This attempt to investigate these causes, and to throw light on an event, so singular and important, will not, perhaps, be deemed an unnecessary digression. – I return from it to the course of the history,[119]

and to do so is of course to restore the dimension of state. The narrative continues in such a way that the adoption of Lutheran reform by some German princes and cities appears merely as an aspect of the problems the Emperor encounters with the Germanic body, now and then the papacy, and occasionally the kingdom of England. Robertson does not tell us in what ways the inscrutable workings of providence are to be seen in the policies of Henry VIII and his advisers; English history appears only in so far as it affects the behaviour of the English state in

[116] *Works*, IV, p. 31.
[117] *Works*, IV, pp. 32–3. For Hume's view of Luther, see above, p. 278; for Gibbon's, *Decline and Fall*, V, ch. 54. [118] *Works*, IV, pp. 33–53. [119] *Works*, IV, pp. 52–3.

the systemic politics of Europe.[120] But as the *History of the Reign of Charles V* moves along its many tracks towards the climax of 1552, Charles's decision to crush the German Protestant alliance and rule as an autocrat in the Empire – rendering it if he can as hereditary in his family as the monarchy of Spain[121] – is presented simply as a hubris of state, the effect of enormous power on a mind not more than humanly able to bear it. It is not the direct and appallingly visible finger of God which ensures that his grand design is frustrated by Maurice of Saxony, in whom, says Robertson, a signal lack of morality appears part of the equipment of a great prince; but it may be God's hidden providence which ensures both this result and Maurice's death soon after in a minor action against the troops of his sometime ally, the bandit warlord Albert of Brandenburg.[122] Robertson is silent, and his epitaph for Maurice is an exercise in historical irony.

Providentially or otherwise, reason of state ensures the Treaty of Passau and the religious peace of Augsburg; but from this point Roberson looks ahead, beyond the confines of his history. He finds it necessary to emphasise that Augsburg was not a display of religious toleration, and that the latter was a phenomenon which history had yet to produce. In three pages,[123] he presents the problem in the form with which we are by now familiar. Intolerance, like its opposite, was unthinkable in antiquity

> because the acknowledging veneration to be due to any one god, did not imply denial of the existence or the power of any other god . . . notwithstanding the amazing number of their deities, as well as the infinite variety of their ceremonies, a sociable and tolerating spirit subsisted almost universally in the pagan world.
>
> But when the Christian revelation declared one Supreme Being to be the sole object of religious veneration and prescribed the form of worship most acceptable to him, whoever admitted the truth of it held, of consequence, every other system of religion as a deviation from what was established by divine authority, to be false and impious.[124]

Christian disputation thus arose; the earliest converts laboured to make others, by conspicuous virtue and the force of argument. There was nothing inappropriate about their doing so, but when the civil power adopted and promoted their religion they fell into the error of seeing impiety as a civil offence. The growth of disputatious theology among the Christians themselves complicated the confusion, and the

[120] E.g., *Works*, IV, p. 254. [121] *Works*, V, pp. 187–8. [122] *Works*, V, pp. 260–2.
[123] *Works*, V, pp. 307–9. [124] *Works*, V, p. 307.

bishops of Rome, by the usual arts, claimed an infallible spiritual authority for themselves and acquired control of the secular power to enforce it. This accumulation of errors was by no means cleared up by the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

> The Roman Catholics, as their system rested on the decisions of an infallible judge, never doubted that truth was on their side, and openly called on the civil power to repel the impious and heretical innovators who had risen up against it. The Protestants, no less confident that their doctrine was well founded, required, with equal ardour, the princes of their party to check such as presumed to impugn it. Luther, Calvin, Cranmer, Knox, the founders of the reformed church in their respective countries, as far as they had power and opportunity, inflicted the same punishments upon such as called in question any article in their creeds which were denounced against their own disciples by the church of Rome.[125]

A new age must dawn before the Protestants could shake off the consequences of Constantinean error and papal usurpation.

> It was towards the close of the seventeenth century, before toleration, under its present form, was admitted first into the republic of the United Provinces, and from thence introduced into England. Long experience of the calamities flowing from mutual persecution, the influence of free government, the light and humanity acquired by the progress of science, together with the prudence and authority of the civil magistrate, were all requisite in order to establish a regulation, so repugnant to the ideas which all the different sects had adopted, from mistaken conceptions concerning the nature of religion and the rights of truth, or which all of them had derived from the erroneous maxims established by the church of Rome.[126]

Robertson was indicating that another history remained to be written, covering the century and a half after the termination of his *Charles V*, which should be a history of toleration and enlightenment gaining ground in the teeth of Protestantism no less than Catholicism. It would be a Dutch and then an English history, and its authors would have to decide whether the decision to disengage civil authority from religious truth had been taken by that authority exercising civil prudence, or by spiritual leaders moved by a new understanding of religion. As an ordained minister, Robertson did not have open to him Hume's conviction that all clerics were equally worthy of blame, or his contemptuous avowal that the function of toleration was to reveal and leave open to ennui the essential absurdity of all theology. But by listing the heroes of

[125] *Works*, v, p. 309. [126] *Works*, v, pp. 309–10.

reform, and Calvin among them, as the continuators of persecution, he had implicitly admitted that this further history must be in part a history of that debate within his own church which has been linked with the Arminian Enlightenment. Hume in the *History of England* had acknowledged its importance, but Robertson was not likely to follow him in proclaiming that the absolute decrees of grace were a principal source of enthusiasm, or to begin enquiring how far their modification by the heirs of Arminius must necessarily point in an anti-Nicene direction, Socinian or Grotian, deist or sceptic. As an ecclesiastical and academic politician daily involved in debate and manoeuvre against the uncompromising Calvinists of the Popular party, it was not his strategy, or in the Moderate interest, to work out and defend a detailed statement of the post-Calvinist position, such as writing a history with Calvinism at its centre would have entailed; far better to rely on the incessant practice of politics, on committees, resolutions and temporary coalitions and majorities. We may have here the reason why neither the history of England once proposed to him, nor the history of Europe in the seventeenth century he had adumbrated, was ever written by him.

The History of the Reign of Charles V moves past its protagonist's abdication and death to the Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, by which point the accessions of Philip II in Spain, Ferdinand I in the Empire and Elizabeth I in England, and the death of Henry II in France, are all in view.[127] The last is observed to inaugurate four decades of intermittent civil wars in France,[128] and the first and second phases (1560–98, 1618–48) of the Wars of Religion, the Eighty Years War in the Netherlands, and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms in Britain, are perceptibly upon us. Robertson says little about them, ending his history with a review of the relatively stable states system of Europe as it stood at the death of Charles V; but he tells us there is another history not yet written.[129] Calvin's name has been mentioned hardly at all, and only in passing,[130] and the later meetings of the Council of Trent have been dismissed as outside Robertson's enterprise; the scene is therefore not set for the history of the Wars of Religion, as civil wars within states as well as wars between states composing a system, involving Calvinist Protestantism and Tridentine Catholicism. Robertson prefers to keep the European

[127] *Works*, v, pp. 387–96. [128] *Works*, v, pp. 405–6.

[129] Cf. pp. 396–7: 'A more known period of history opens at this era; other actors enter upon the stage, with different views, as well as different passions; new contests arose, and new schemes of ambition occupied and disquieted mankind.'

[130] He has no entry in the index. *Works*, v, pp. 309, 310.

states system at centre stage, rather than show it torn apart by confessional conflict.

There is, however, an important though marginal exception. He does not join Hume (and Gibbon) in characterising the first reformers, including Calvin, as enthusiasts all; he does not adopt the radically sceptical analysis of all religious phenomena as forms of either enthusiasm or superstition. The mention of Islam aside, the term 'enthusiast' seems to occur three times in Robertson's history. Predictably enough, it is applied to Thomas Munzer and the insurgent peasants of 1525,[131] then to the Anabaptist leaders at Münster in 1535; the evolution of Anabaptism from fanaticism to peaceable quietism and sociability is duly noted.[132] But the third enthusiast is none other than Ignatius Loyola, and the self-secularisation of enthusiasm in this instance takes the shape of the formidable organisation of the Society of Jesus, with its commitment to penetration of the secular world, its unlimited ambitions, and its more than masonic secrecy and obedience. There ensues a digression[133] recounting the whole history of the Society, as known on the morrow of its suppression: how its involvement in politics was in every case pernicious, its involvement in society and culture often surprisingly benign. The Jesuit schools and colleges did much for the growth of polite literature and learning,[134] and we are treated to an account of their empire in Paraguay, where the extinction of private property has rendered human society happy by eliminating the human passions.[135] The Enlightened mind looks on this with admiration and mistrust, and it is the prelude to the fall of the Jesuits, that great event in Enlightened history so recent when Robertson wrote. He makes use of the *comptes-rendus* of the Jesuit archives written by French provincial magistrates[136] and of d'Alembert's treatise *Sur la destruction des Jesuites*,[137] and concludes, after mentioning their 'decency, and even purity of manners':[138]

> The causes which occasioned the ruin of this mighty body, as well as the circumstances and effects with which it has been attended in the different countries of Europe, though objects extremely worthy of attention of every intelligent observer of human affairs, do not fall within the period of this history.[139]

Why then expend fifteen pages on the Society's rise and fall? Robertson's digression may be read as an introduction to the history that remained unwritten, in which Calvinists and Jesuits would have played

[131] *Works*, IV, pp. 183–5. [132] *Works*, IV, pp. 267–76. [133] *Works*, IV, pp. 355–69.
[134] *Works*, IV, pp. 364–5. [135] *Works*, IV, p. 366. [136] Notes to pp. 355, 359, 360, 369.
[137] Notes to pp. 357, 360, 365, 369. [138] *Works*, IV, p. 369. [139] *Ibid.*

principal roles: a history of Europe from Reformation to Enlightenment, presenting the Wars of Religion not only as a setback to the growth of the European states system, but as a confessional conflict on a global scale, in which Counter-Reformation Catholicism extended itself hugely in the re-Catholicised lands of the Danube and in Spanish and Portuguese America; in which, as the papacy, stabilised by the Spanish hegemony in Italy, grew less arrogant and more humane and Christian,[140] the Society of Jesus took its place by controlling the councils of Spanish, Austrian[141] and French monarchs; in which Protestantism, everywhere at bay, generated from its internal tensions the forces which would resist the *siècle de Louis XIV* and bring about the moderation and enlightenment of the Christian religion. This is what a Moderate history of seventeenth-century Europe could have contained; the necessary materials and organising concepts were available; but there were good reasons why it remained unwritten. Robertson stopped in 1559; as Felix Gilbert perceptively remarked, everything he wrote, on Scotland, Europe and America, is focused on the sixteenth century.[142] On the assumption that 'philosophic history' was a series of paradigms designed to present the emergence of 'modern' in the sense of 'post-medieval' history, we have explored to its limits the use by the two great Scotsmen who established the possibility of a British philosophical history. There remains the problem of how Gibbon, as third member of their triumvirate, came to turn his back on the history of 'modernity' in this sense, and embark on a philosophical history 'modern' in the older sense that it pursued the post-antique history of the Christian millennium.

[140] *Works*, V, pp. 409–17.
[141] The last words of the *History* (V, p. 421) are: 'the bigotry and ambition of the house of Austria'.
[142] Gilbert, 1972, p. xxi.

CHAPTER 19

Robertson: histories written and unwritten

Robertson's historiographical achievement is already visible and massive, though the survey of it is only half completed. Furthermore, it was left incomplete by its author. The *History of America* which Robertson published in 1778 is his major work after and beside the *Reign of Charles V*, but there are several reasons why it should not be examined in this study. Appearing two years after volume I of the *Decline and Fall*, it does not belong to the context in which Gibbon's history took its first shape; rather, to the context formed by the War of the American Revolution, in which the *Decline and Fall* was read and its middle volumes written. That context was, Robertson declared, a context of civil war, in which – here he echoed Thomas May before him – it was difficult to write history at all, and inappropriate to write the history of the forms of government now at war with themselves.[143] For this reason, the *History of America* is incomplete; intended like Raynal's *Histoire des Deux Indes* to provide a survey of all the European empires established in the New World, it omits English America because of the war now going on, and gives a history of the Spanish conquests only, not extended to the Portuguese, Dutch and French. There remain two chapters on New England and Virginia, which were published posthumously[144] and – since Robertson lived till 1793 – leave us wondering what the completed history would have been like and why it was never written. The project, frustrated by the war of 1775–1783, does not fully explicate the context of the earlier war of 1756–1763, during and in the wake of which Voltaire, Hume, Robertson and Ferguson completed and published their versions of the 'Enlightened narrative'.

There are other reasons for considering Robertson's achievement as both great and incomplete, and these entail some examination of questions he left answered and unanswered; also of histories, which were

[143] *Works*, VI, 'Preface', sig. B2 (p. 3). [144] *Works*, VIII, books IX and X.

both written and not written, by Robertson himself and by other historians including Gibbon, in the contexts of British history, European and American history, and the general history of civil society which other Scots were elaborating. The study of Robertson, long neglected, is now being taken up by a number of hands,[145] all of whom are indebted to their predecessor Felix Gilbert for his observation that in every field Robertson broke off in the sixteenth century. The *History of Scotland*, to begin our survey there, concludes with the Union of the Crowns in 1603, and does not cover what in our terminology is called the Age of the Three Kingdoms, ensuing till the Union of the Parliaments in 1707. Robertson observes that the removal of the court from Holyrood to Whitehall spelt the end of any prospect of an independent Scots high culture. To this the Scottish Enlightenment was intended as a remedy, but as we know was conceived in Unionist terms; Scots were to adopt English culture and English history, while outdoing the English at its Enlightened exposition. The *History of Scotland*, therefore, appeared in the company of Hume's *History of Great Britain*, in which Scots were enjoined to consider English history 'theirs' and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, with their resolution in 1688–1691, narrated in terms so Anglocentric as to leave Scottish actions and their problems at best peripherally visible. It is likely that Robertson accepted this paradigm. We do not know what charge he would have accepted, or imposed upon himself, if he had taken up the proposal apparently made to him that he write a history of England. Possibly – indeed probably – it would have led to a history the parallel of Hume's, written in terms less disturbingly irreligious and hostile to constitutional myth; but there exists, at least in theory, the possibility of another outcome. We now know – though only in the last quarter of the twentieth century have we come to realise – that it would be possible to write a 'British history' of the War of the Three Kingdoms, in which the rebellion of the National Covenant imposes war on England, the Solemn League and Covenant stands for the Scottish endeavour to determine its outcome in both kingdoms, and the disaster of Dunbar signals the defeat of the disintegrating Covenant alliance at the hands of Englishmen determined to settle their civil war without interference by others, even if this means defeating and annexing the latter.

Such a British history – English in its outcome but not its beginnings – may never have entered Robertson's mind, and certainly he did not

[145] Brown, 1997; O'Brien, 1997; Sher and Smitten, 1990.

write it. He dismissed it, however, neither by writing an anti-Covenanting nor by writing an Anglocentric history of the Three Kingdoms period, but by writing no history of the seventeenth century at all. There is to be found, and there has been properly emphasised,[146] a passage in which Robertson distances himself from the Covenant and its history, describing it (as many English writers described the Revolution of 1688–9) as a temporary and laudable necessity, but not the foundation of principle on which the national life is to be conducted. Here is the voice of Moderatism, the voice of conservative Enlightenment in Scotland; but, though the Moderates rewrote history and included more than one major historical thinker, there was not going to be any Moderate history of the Covenants, or of Calvinism, or of Scotland, or Europe in the seventeenth century. Moderatism was Enlightenment working from within, operating to modify the Calvinist Kirk rather than to replace it; and to write a history of Covenanting Calvinism would have been to indicate by what alternatives it might in principle be replaced. Robertson chose not to do this, to leave the Moderate, Enlightened history of the Covenanting era unwritten (though it might be in that history that the origins of Moderatism itself were to be found). In the absence of a civil and ecclesiastical history of the period, the gap was filled by a popular, and deeply felt, history that was largely a martyrology, and in which the persecuted and the persecutors of Wandering Willie's Tale enjoyed a prominence unsupported by analysis of their positions and the alternatives open to them. If this is the voice of Colin Kidd's white dwarf,[147] it utters the sentimental rather than the Enlightened reading of Scotto-British history.

Similar remarks may be made on the conclusion of Robertson's history of modern Europe. It must first be observed, however, that he begins European history in times so remote as to be pre-Roman and that this raises questions about the original barbaric inhabitants of the sub-continent, which Smith and Ferguson were to answer but he did not. There follows the *View of the Progress of Society in Europe*, a macronarrative taking us from the end of the Roman to the formation of the Habsburg empire, and constituting by far the most focused and lucid account of the 'Christian millennium' we have so far encountered. It was to be of high significance to Gibbon; his famous sentence

> If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would,

[146] Kidd, in Brown, 1997, p. 143; O'Brien, 1997, pp. 127–8. [147] Above, p. 265.

> without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus,[148]

follows word for word Robertson's sentence about the period 'most calamitous and afflicted',[149] and Gibbon means no disrespect by the adaptation. There is little in the *View of the Progress of Society* which Gibbon does not endorse; its version of post-Roman history pervades the *Decline and Fall* at every point; and yet the paradox is that Gibbon chose not to follow it. Like every other version of 'the Enlightened narrative' and 'the Christian millennium', Robertson's is a narrative of the middle ages in the Latin provinces of the former Roman empire, their fall into papal and feudal power and their emergence from it; but Gibbon, while fully accepting the fact that he was living and writing in that history, elected not to narrate it, but instead to pursue post-Roman history along a path leading to the fall of Constantinople in 1453, in a setting of Byzantine and Eurasian history with which he found great difficulty in dealing. It will be necessary to enquire further into the reasons for this decision, among which may be noted the possibility that he found Robertson's treatment of the Enlightened narrative so satisfactory that he chose not to repeat it. Here is another unwritten history, left unwritten not by Robertson but perhaps in response to him.

Breaking his narrative off in 1453, Gibbon incurred no obligation to deal with the world as transformed by the Spanish and Portuguese voyages of the 1490s. Robertson, continuing to 1559, took two terminatory decisions: one explicit, that he would not include American empire in his history of Charles V's reign, since the encounter between European and Amerindian manners required a separate treatment; the other nearer to being implicit, that there was a further history in view with its outcomes in religious toleration and the fall of the Jesuits, but that he would not write it. These two histories were not unconnected. The history of the Enlightened states system was a history of the decline of Spain and the rise of France and the Maritime Powers; and since the middle of the seventeenth century there had existed an explanation of these processes which claimed that the Spanish monarchy had failed to organise its American empire into an efficient mercantile capitalism, whereas this secret had been mastered by the Dutch, the English, belatedly the Scots and most formidably because monarchically the French. Here was a way of making both American and Indian empire a

[148] *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. 3 (Womersley, I, p. 103). [149] Above, p. 279.

part of the history of the European states, and there were ways of carrying the story through the wars of 1672, 1688 and 1702, past the *siècle de Louis XIV* and into the Utrecht society of states in which Enlightenment became established. This is the history Robertson left unwritten, and as far as is known no other Scottish historian attempted it. We look for it in vain in the rather tenuous St Andrews Enlightenment made up of Robert Watson and his continuator William Thomson, who published histories of the reigns of Philip II and III. These raise our hopes of a sequel to Robertson's *Charles V*, but Watson had little capacity for the philosophic generalisations out of which Enlightened narratives were constructed, though Thomson had rather more.[150] The effect is that we do not have a Scottish Enlightened history of the Europe in which Enlightenment took shape and became possible. Of such a history those of post-Covenanting Scotland and English America would have formed part, and without it we confront the general lack of seventeenth-century history in Enlightened historiography. Only in England, it would seem, did the imperatives of historiography impose a narrative carried through to 1688 and beyond. The national context had its own driving force, and demanded its own cosmopolitan setting.

For all these reasons, Robertson's narrative histories – his Enlightenment narrative, as we may term them together – end at a point far behind Hume in the order of events. The *History of America*, published later and never completed as planned, belongs in a different historical category. Because the history of manners is sharply separated from the history of states, and because the assumption is made that Amerindian manners and society can with few exceptions be dealt with under the heading of 'savagery' – a key term in all law-based schemes of historical development – it belongs rather to the history of civil society, a species of philosophical historiography of which little has yet been said, and which stands aside from the narrative of exemplary deeds and Tacitean arcana. The *History of America* (1777) is somewhat closer to Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), John Millar's *The Origin of Ranks* (1771–79), and Adam Smith's *Essay on the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), than to Raynal and Diderot's *Histoire des Deux Indes* (1770–80), in which a systematic treatment is constantly proposed and intermittently executed of what the predatory commerce of pre-capitalist Europe has done and is doing to Indian, African and American societies, as well as to the insecure finance, government, civility and Enlightenment of the European states carrying it on. Scottish conjectural history, however, was a necessary feature of the Enlightened narrative and of considerable importance to Gibbon and the creation of philosophical historiography.

[150] Watson, 1785, 1786. He is a figure of note in the process by which rhetoric was transmuted to become literary criticism; see Crawford (ed.), 1998, introduction and chapter 1. For Thomson see *DNB*, 'Thomson, William (1746–1817)'. He was an associate of the unhappy Gilbert Stuart; Zachs, 1992.

PART III

The progress of civil society

SECTION V

Adam Smith: jurisprudence into history

CHAPTER 20

Moral philosophy and the stages of society

> On this interesting subject, the progress of society in Europe, a strong ray of philosophic light has broke from Scotland in our own times; and it is with private, as well as public regard, that I repeat the names of Hume, Robertson, and Adam Smith.
>
> Edward Gibbon[1]

The above words, occurring in the last volume of the *Decline and Fall*, somewhat antedate the allusion to 'the triumvirate of British historians' found in the *Memoirs*;[2] and though the names of Hume and Robertson are common to both triads, the earlier passage should not be read as simply completing what is after all the later. The 'triumvirate' is composed of 'historians', and there is an important sense in which Adam Smith was not a historian and never wrote a history. Of course there is another, in which he vastly enriched the understanding of history as archaeology of the past, as process of social change and as macro-narrative; and the word 'history' sometimes occurs, in his writings and in those of his contemporaries, as denoting what is understood in these ways. But it also occurs, notably in his university lectures, in the older sense of exemplary and instructive narrative, where the subject-matter is the actions of ruling persons; and Smith is emphatic that 'history' in the new sense gets in the way of 'history' in the old, and lacks the latter's intrinsic interest. The Momiglianan synthesis is not yet complete; the triad of 'histories' has not yet become a single system; and Gibbon,

[1] *Decline and Fall*, VI, ch. 61, n. 69; Womersley, III, p. 728; Bury, VI, p. 465.

[2] Above, p. 163. See however *Letters*, II, p. 361, where Gibbon, writing to Robertson in September 1783, refers to himself as the Lepidus of this 'triumvirate'. The letter reads as if he had been invited to visit Edinburgh, but could not do so on the eve of his resettlement in Lausanne. He is also urging Robertson to write more history.

credited by Momigliano with achieving this synthesis, none the less distinguishes between 'the triumvirate of British historians' and another triumvirate who have shed 'philosophic light' on 'the progress of society'. Hume and Robertson, it is true, belong to both triumvirates, but it is equally true that Adam Smith does not. In assessing the Scottish contribution to the *Decline and Fall*, particularly to its formation and earlier volumes, it is necessary to take stock of the kinds of history which Smith and his colleagues and associates did and did not write.

For Hume and Robertson, as we have followed them in the preceding sections, the Enlightened narrative culminated in the formation, during and after the sixteenth century, of a 'Europe' of contending monarchies, each capable of civil government and reason of state, and so of replacing a 'Christendom' of papal authority and religious warfare by that European commonwealth or republic of states which took shape at the end of the *siècle de Louis XIV*. The capacity of these states for war and treaty – strongly though the historians and *philosophes* counselled the avoidance of war – was necessary to their capacity to govern themselves and escape ecclesiastical control or conflict; and the republic of Europe was constituted in large measure by the treaties between states forming its public law – natural or positive, but probably the former.[3] As we have seen, however, this was not its sole constituent; it was also held together by a common civilisation – manners, commerce, enlightenment – similarly emerging from its past, ancient as well as modern, as it left the millennium of barbarism and religion behind. A history of society – for manners constituted society as well as culture – was therefore as necessary as a history of government; and if Giannone had moved little beyond the latter, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Hume and Robertson had in their several ways paid attention to the former. There were murmurings of a historiography which should devote itself to *moeurs* at the expense of *rois* – Gibbon's *empire de la mode* was as restless then as it is now – but since the state and its sovereignty were necessary in order to confront and control organised religion, narratives of state-formation and political action retained their place in the armoury of Enlightened historiography.

We have now to consider the growth of a species of 'natural' or 'conjectural' history of civil society in general, formulated by persons who did not regard themselves as 'historians' or their works as 'histories', but were capable of using the term 'history', as well as 'progress',

[3] The classic eighteenth-century study of the nature of confederation is that of Vattel, 1758.

of 'civil society'. These authors were Scots, university professors, and active in what we term 'Scottish Enlightenment', both in Edinburgh and in the rather different milieu of Glasgow.[4] The origin, extent and nature of Gibbon's involvement with them and their works is not easy to ascertain. He knew Adam Smith personally, more than once insists on his friendship with him,[5] and owned copies of both the works Smith published in their joint lifetimes.[6] He corresponded directly and indirectly with Adam Ferguson,[7] and though his works do not appear in the footnotes to the *Decline and Fall*, Gibbon possessed both the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* – which there is other evidence to bring close to him – and the *History of the Rise, Progress and Termination of the Roman Republic*, a work more obviously related to his own.[8] A third figure, John Millar, so closely connected with Smith that he cannot be left out of the story, seems altogether unknown to Gibbon, who neither mentions him nor possessed his writings. The progress of Gibbon's friendship with Smith presents a problem. Both were members of the Literary Club, Gibbon from 1774, Smith from the following year. We know that Johnson disliked Smith and Boswell Gibbon, and it is tempting to imagine them sitting apart to discuss the history of society, disregarding whatever thunderous conversational events were taking place around Johnson's chair; the record of their dinner attendance, however, leaves room for this only in 1776–7, during and after the publication of both Gibbon's first volume and Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*.[9] The formation of the latter's ideas on the progress of society can be dated much earlier than Gibbon's knowledge of them.

Between 1751 and 1763 – the years of Gibbon's youth, exile and militia service – Smith exercised the professorships of logic and rhetoric, and of moral philosophy, in the university of Glasgow, coinciding from 1761 with the first two years of the much younger John Millar's much longer professorship of law, which continued until close to the latter's death in 1801.[10] As professor of moral philosophy, Smith published his *Theory of*

[4] Hook and Sher, 1995.

[5] *Decline and Fall*, vol. II, ch. 24, n. 15 (Womersley, I, p. 913; Bury, II, p. 509): 'a sage and a friend'. These words were published in 1781. [6] *Library*, pp. 252–3.

[7] *Letters*, II, pp. 96, 100–1 (salutes Ferguson's historical studies and 'our common friend' Smith's *Wealth of Nations*), 154, 233.

[8] Ferguson, 1783, reprinted 1799. This work is of course a 'history' in the sense in which Smith and Millar did not share.

[9] There is a detailed study of Gibbon's membership in the Literary Club by Pat Rogers, 'Gibbon and the Decline and Growth of the Club', in Womersley, 1997: See also Low, ch. 15. In 1776 Gibbon attended 14 dinners and Smith 6; in 1777 they each dined 8 times.

[10] See the life of Millar by John Craig; Millar, 1806.

Moral Sentiments in 1759 – Gibbon owned two later editions – and lectured extensively on jurisprudence, which he considered central to the study of ethics. We have extensive notes of these lectures, made by students and now published as the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, as of his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres*,[11] but he did not develop either into a book. Millar likewise lectured on jurisprudence – exactly how his course was related to the two Smith was giving, between 1761 and 1763, need not concern us – and his major work, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1779), of which an early version appeared under a different title in 1771,[12] shows that both men were developing a historical scheme of jurisprudence about which Smith continued to think between leaving his professorship in 1764 (the year of Gibbon's visit to Rome) and publishing *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 (the year of the first *Decline and Fall*) and indeed for the remainder of his life. In what sense these works were, and were self-described as, 'history', and how this use of the word relates to its other employments, is a question which obliges us to consider the nature of the 'Scottish Enlightenment' in which we suppose that they, and others, were engaged.

For all its Episcopalian and Catholic dissenters, Hanoverian Scotland was as solidly Calvinist a society as any in Europe; and this lends a special interest to the reading of its Enlightenment as, like others, a reaction against Calvinism.[13] It is hard to find much trace of the 'Arminian Enlightenment' we have traced in Switzerland, the Netherlands, France and in its own way England; there is little sign of a theology seeking to mitigate the decrees of grace and accused in response of Socinianism. It is true that Francis Hutcheson, the Ulster forefather of Scottish Enlightenment, appears to have been of Arian opinions,[14] and that John Simson, like him a shaper of the University of Glasgow as Smith knew it, was repeatedly and not without foundation accused of various heresies.[15] Yet this was not the front along which the clerical battle-lines were drawn; the Edinburgh Moderates, discussed in the previous chapter, and the Glasgow professoriate adopted a different strategy. Holders of appointments in the ministry and the universities,

[11] Cited as *LJ* and *LRBL*.

[12] *Observations concerning the Distinction of Ranks in Society* was published by John Murray in London in 1771. The third edition (1779) bore the title *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, by which the work has since been known. See Craig in Millar, 1806.

[13] *EEG*, ch. 2.

[14] I am indebted to James Moore and Richard Sher for help on this point.

[15] For the case of John Simson, professor of divinity at Glasgow, attacked for anti-Trinitarian views in 1714 and 1729, see Sher, 1985, p. 49, n. 8; Hook and Sher, 1995, pp. 21, 26, 57–9. There is also the case of Thomas Aikenhead, executed for blasphemy in 1697.

they set about a transformation of moral philosophy which should render theological debate unnecessary, and often subscribed to Presbyterian orthodoxy and thereafter abstained from discussing it. Their Calvinist opponents understood well enough what they were about; it was Enlightenment from within, which could on occasion lead to positions well outside Christian belief. Adam Smith was, while their joint lives lasted, a close friend and colleague of David Hume, and his scepticism does not seem to have fallen short of the latter's, whose outspoken irreligion compromised the Moderates' discretion. None the less, ethics and not theology provided the issue, and when a reaction against extremes took shape within, rather than against, the Moderate Enlightenment, it came in the form of Common Sense philosophy, which opposed to Hume's scepticism in matters of ethics an attempt to endow the human mind with an immediate perception of moral truths.[16] If Hume was openly irreligious, and as openly attacked as such, it was long before his friends in Edinburgh or Glasgow were obliged to declare for or against him.

The strategy of Enlightenment in Scotland was the development of a science of morality, which on the assumption that humans were intrinsically social beings became a science of society in all its ramifications. It is necessary to understand how it was that this enterprise took the form of jurisprudence, which was then organised into history and next – most importantly but less immediately so for the purposes of the present volume – into political economy. Smith at Glasgow lectured on jurisprudence as professor of moral philosophy, Millar as professor of civil law. Both proceeded from the assumption that since humans were moral and social beings, the pursuit of justice in society – which was the subject matter of jurisprudence – was capable of supplying a complete lexicon and map of the moral life. Here of course was a fundamental departure from the Calvinist position that human morality entailed a relationship with God and, since the Fall, could not be conducted without the operations of a divine grace so absolute as to take little account of what sinners had done in their social lives or their history. Since it was a consequence that human moral codes were radically incomplete, it was not impossible that there should exist Calvinist histories – possibly Tacitean histories – of them in their incompleteness.[17] The Enlightened, however, seized the high ground; they exhibited morality, sociability

[16] For the work of Thomas Reid, see Sher, 1985, pp. 311–14; Haakonssen, 1990, introduction and 1996, chs. 6–7.

[17] For the role of Calvinism, see Allan, 1993, and the literature surveyed in his introduction.

and as we shall see history, as systems intelligible in themselves, and without bothering to deny the efficacy of grace, left it to attach itself as best it could to phenomena that could be understood without it. Gibbon, never a Scots philosopher, was to proceed in this way when writing the history of the Christian church.

In the lectures Smith delivered at Glasgow, and in those given at the same time by Millar, we find jurisprudence organised as history, and history so organised said to depict 'the progress of society' (Gibbon significantly follows Robertson in adding the words 'in Europe'). This came about in a number of ways. In the first place, all systems of natural jurisprudence contained or implied narratives of how justice, law and government had emerged from a state of nature; and these had long hinged upon an account of how primeval humans had appropriated the earth's surface and some of its life-forms and encountered the need of laws to distribute and protect the property thus created. Moral philosophy was itself dependent on narratives of this kind. It is possible to include the thinking of the Scottish Enlightenment in a family of German, Dutch and Scandinavian explorations of natural jurisprudence,[18] and its 'progress of society' as a particular case of the narrative of emergence from the state of nature; Smith will imagine the encounter of two savages in a wilderness as lying at the origins of language, or a crew of both sexes wrecked on a desert island as lying at the origins of political economy.[19] These are pure thought-experiments, and not very different are the operations of 'theoretical history', ascribed to Smith by Dugald Stewart in an *éloge* delivered to the Royal Society of Edinburgh two years after Smith's death.

> In examining the history of mankind, as well as in examining the phenomena of the material world, when we cannot trace the process by which an event *has been* produced, it is often of importance to show how it *may have been* produced by natural causes. Thus, in the instance which has suggested these remarks, although it is impossible to determine with certainty what the steps were by which any particular language was formed, yet if we can shew, from the general principles of human nature, how all its various parts might gradually have arisen, the mind is not only to a certain degree satisfied, but a check is given to that indolent philosophy, which refers to a miracle, whatever appearances, both in the natural and moral worlds, it is unable to explain.
>
> To this species of philosophical investigation, which has no appropriated name in our language, I shall take the liberty of giving the title of *Theoretical* or *Conjectural History*; an expression which coincides pretty nearly in its meaning

[18] Haakonssen, 1996. [19] *LRBL*, pp. 23–8; *LJ*, pp. 14–15.

> with that of *Natural History*, as employed by Mr Hume, and with what some French writers have called *Histoire Raisonnée*.[20]

Here indeed there is a 'history of mankind' to be accounted for, not a mere emergence from the state of nature, and it is being presented as a sequence of states: the famous four stages into which Smith and others organised much previous European speculation,[21] and made to consist in the succession of hunters, herdsmen, farmers and traders. As presented by Stewart, however, they consist merely in thought-experiments, and the history of society they provide is a natural history. This is a narrative of how the human mind might have organised itself into justice and civility, given certain simple assumptions about the material and animal environment in which it might find itself. As expounded by Smith and others, it is true, the narrative shows the mind as itself developing; it discovers new capacities, including the imaginative and fictive capacities without which (it had been recognised since the time of Locke) the use of money, and of letters, could never have taken place. But the sequence is an imaginary and conjectural one, like those described by Smith in his histories of philosophy;[22] it has been invented to account for the existence of phenomena, not as a means of narrating a history said to have taken place, or – except indirectly and illustratively – to account for the phenomena organised into the narratives and macronarratives of historiography. Yet Smith in his Glasgow lectures may be found speaking of 'the history of Europe' and offering to give an account of it; and from the moment he does so, the problem of the relation of natural to civil history, of philosophy to historiography, is before us once more. Neither Smith, nor Millar, nor Ferguson, was content to remain a theoretical historian; each of them offered to narrate, if not necessarily to unify, the histories of Europe and mankind. In consequence, the scheme of natural history, to which their study of jurisprudence gave rise, merged and in some ways collided with the narratives of systemic transformation into which the historiography of Europe was already organised.

Smith's most remarkable contribution to the natural history of society

[20] *An Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LLD., from the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, read by Mr Stewart, January 21 and March 18, 1793*. Smith had died in July, 1790. See Wightman (ed.), 1982, p. 293.

[21] Meek, 1976, remains a valuable study of four-stages theory, but is flawed by an overlong search for the first appearance of the theory in its most developed form. It is now recognised that various versions of the stadial sequence were common property among European scholars, and were developed by various authors in various ways. See Hont, 1987.

[22] Wightman (ed.), 1982, pp. 5–132.

was his insistence that the shepherd stage was dynamic, a decisive breach with the hunting and food-gathering condition of the 'savage'; that it had been with the appropriation of hoofed mammals, not of arable land, that government, property and war, class distinctions and gender differentiations, had first appeared. In most previous systems of this kind, the shepherd was little distinguished from the hunter, and the origins of civilisation were located in the change from a nomadic to a sedentary way of life. For all his admiration of Smith, it was to be a work expounding this older thesis – Antoine-Yves Goguet's *De l'origine des loix, des arts et des sciences*[23] – that Gibbon chiefly followed, and he continued to describe shepherds by the technically imprecise epithet of 'savages'.[24] It is important, however, that Gibbon required an account of pastoral culture for purposes less philosophic than historiographic; he was concerned with the general history of society in order to furnish himself with the history of Central Asian steppe nomads,[25] from the Huns to the Manchu, who had shaken all civilisations from China to Rome, but in particular had pushed the semi-pastoral, semi-agrarian Goths and Germans into their decisive encounter with the decaying civilisation of the Latin provinces. From this there had somehow emerged the allodial and feudal tenures which – for Smith and Millar no less than for Gibbon – had been among the many and colliding foundations of European commerce, liberty and Enlightenment.

It may be that Smith's emphasis on the dynamism of shepherd culture belongs with the great eighteenth-century revival of nomad studies as a means to the assertion of European uniqueness. Cattle-herding societies were to be expropriated from Scotland to Mongolia; but the intimate association of the shepherd with the agriculturalist – the cowboy and the farmer should be friends – led towards an expropriation conceptually deeper still: the expulsion from history as Europeans understood it of all societies which could be termed 'savage', either because their hunter-gatherer culture coincided with the description of it given by the four-stage scheme, or because their fishing and gardening cultures did not fit within the limitations of that scheme, and so were rejected by it. The dialectic of shepherd and ploughman – for agriculture in the end meant appropriation by the furrow – was imaginable only in Eurasia with the steppe grasslands at its centre; it did not apply in the Americas or in Polynesia, and was not applied to an Africa still very little known. The dialectic of barbarism and religion, consequently,

[23] Goguet, 1758. [24] Pocock, 1981. [25] De Guignes, 1756.

became a means of proclaiming European uniqueness and ascendancy, and we are about to explore a series of Scottish theses leading to the declaration that Europe was aboriginally settled by shepherds and had never passed through the savage state at all. With the Scots, though not only in them, we see the 'Enlightened narrative' moving into the narrative of Europe as world empire.

The theoretical or conjectural 'history' of 'the progress of society' was a heuristic construct or system, which should have been applicable either to all human societies or to none of them in its particularity. As constructed, however, it was built upon premises that made it peculiarly applicable to the history of Europe as that was supposed to have taken place; and some remarkable consequences followed. The 'savage' state was extruded from European history, and the history of pre-Columbian America extruded from 'the progress of society'. There was a sense in which the movement from shepherd to farmer to merchant and polite citizen, in which 'the progress of society' was held to consist, was presented as occurring in the history of Europe alone – 'orientals' being excluded from it, for a different set of reasons, by the premise that they were the servile subjects of despotism – but this did not mean that European history was reducible to a simple sequence of stages. It independently possessed its own organisation into other sequences: Homeric to republican, republican to imperial, imperial to feudal, allodial to commercial, and in addition the great sequences of pagan, Christian and Enlightened, civic to ecclesiastical to polite. With these the professors of historical jurisprudence made little attempt to deal, leaving them to their collaborators Hume and Robertson, historians of state as well as society and possessed of narrative techniques suited to the purpose. Civil history, in short, increasingly asserted itself alongside natural, in proportion as 'the progress of society' became 'the progress of society in Europe'; European historiography independently possessed narrative techniques for dealing with many of the sequences just enumerated. The Glasgow professors claimed no hegemony over this historiography; they did not claim that their narrative superseded other narratives in the *empire de la mode*, only that it reinforced and illuminated them. Gibbon names Hume and Robertson alongside Smith, because he correctly sees that their narratives owe much to Smith, as his own has come to do; but he names them first, because they are historians in the same sense that he is. Smith claimed no authority over civil history, but we shall find that in his Glasgow lectures he was uncertain how authority should be distributed between history in its original narrative sense

and history as he saw it being written about him; while if he intended a universal macronarrative of all the forms which jurisprudence and civil society were known to have assumed in history, he did not complete it and left instructions for the burning of manuscripts that may have been intended for it.[26] We are still at a point where the Momiglianan synthesis is incomplete.

[26] Ross, 1995, pp. 404–6.

CHAPTER 21

Smith's Glasgow lectures: narrative and philosophical history

The texts that we have of Adam Smith's lectures on jurisprudence and on rhetoric and *belles-lettres* are not works written by the lecturer's hand, but notes compiled by students. In each case two reporters seem to have been at work, and it is not clear how far Smith authorised their reports or communicated his actual language to them. The texts were not published until a version of the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* came to light in 1896,[27] and for full critical editions we have had to await those used here. We read them not as incidents in the history of books, but as records of a series of pedagogic occasions. Neither Gibbon nor any other member of the public created by print read them, and they have no part in the interaction of books which we are studying; they are considered here because we wish to understand how conjectural history, of which Smith offers a specially important case, affected historical narrative. They constitute a pedagogic occasion because they seem to date from the same academic year – 1762–63, near the end of Smith's tenure at Glasgow University – and because they appear to have been given concurrently; those on jurisprudence forming Smith's 'public' lecture at the beginning of the day, those on rhetoric and *belles-lettres* his 'private' lecture, given to a more select class who had heard the earlier lecture. There are cross-references here and there, and when we reflect that from 1761 John Millar was lecturing on ground close to that covered by Smith's course on jurisprudence, the intellectual life of Glasgow students appears strenuous indeed.[28] There are, furthermore, some points at which the relation between Smith's two lecture courses seems on the face of things somewhat problematic.

These lectures were given by Smith as professor of moral philosophy – it was Millar who spoke of jurisprudence from the standpoint of a

[27] Cannan, 1896.

[28] *LJ*, pp. 1–4; *LRBL*, pp. 7–12; Craig, in Millar, 1806, pp. iv–v, xi–xxiii. See further Ross, 1995, pp. 118–31; Crawford (ed.), 1998, pp. 37–42.

professor of law – and convey the Enlightened message that the moral life of a human is that of a social, civil and as we shall see a historical being. They form part of Smith's moral philosophy, as we should use the term, in so far as they are based on, and reinforce, the complex doctrine of sympathy independently expressed in his book on *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. We have noticed, however, that the term 'philosophy' is frequently used in the eighteenth century to denote something a good deal less programmatic and less committed to the systematic exposition of an epistemology of ethics; and the present study is limited to the enquiry into the history of eighteenth-century historiography, and to the aims of enquiring how Smith was led to furnish his moral philosophy with a historical dimension, and in what ways this affected the writing of history as Gibbon and others undertook it.

John Millar's account of the matter is often quoted. He says that Smith divided the subject of moral philosophy into four parts: first, natural theology; second, ethics 'strictly so called', as set out in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; thirdly, justice, the main theme of the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*; and fourthly, something to which Millar did not give a name, but which seems closely coterminous with what in these lectures is called 'police'. On the subject of justice, Millar says that Smith

> followed the plan that seems to be suggested by Montesquieu: endeavouring to trace the gradual progress of jurisprudence, both public and private, from the rudest to the most refined ages, and to point out the effects of those arts which contribute to subsistence, and to the accumulation of property, in producing correspondent improvements or alterations in law and government. This important branch of his labours he also intended to give to the public; but this intention, which is mentioned in the conclusion of The Theory of Moral Sentiments, he did not live to fulfil.
>
> In the last part of his lectures, he examined those political regulations which are founded, not upon the principle of *justice*, but that of *expediency*, and which are calculated to increase the riches, the power, and the prosperity of a State. Under this view, he considered the political institutions relating to commerce, to finances, to ecclesiastical and military establishments. What he delivered on these subjects contained the substance of the work he afterwards published under the title of An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.[29]

Millar was saying that Smith followed Montesquieu, and went beyond him, in holding that the moral life, being social, was completed only under government and in commerce; and that since the commercial condition was historically recent, it was necessary to supply both jurisprudence and justice leading from the rude beginnings towards it. We shall find, however, that this scheme is more than a whiggish teleology. The earlier stages were already established in the jurist mind as steps leading out of a primitive or 'natural' condition towards a state of civil government which preceded the perfection, if not the invention, of commerce; and they could be used to supply a 'natural history' of civil society of use in explaining the content of the often archaic systems of law by which it was contemporaneously governed. In saying that Smith passed from considerations of justice to those of expediency in examining the growth of the state's power, financial, ecclesiastical (note the role assigned to churches here) and military, Millar may seem to be laying the foundation of an *Adam Smith Problem* with which it is not the intention of this work to deal. But Smith's last work contends that it is in the wealth of individuals, not the state, that 'the wealth of nations' consists; and we are taking it as granted that the moral life of individuals depends upon the growth and progress of both civil government and commercial prosperity. In turning to 'the riches, the power, and the prosperity of a State', therefore, we are not abandoning moral philosophy but completing it to the point where expediency, and the pursuit and elaboration of power, necessarily become part of it. Smith's lectures of 1762–63 consequently offer a fourfold division into 'justice, police, revenue and arms',[30] and it was under this title that they were published in 1896. In moving from 'justice' to the later categories, Smith did not abandon the subject of jurisprudence or that of moral philosophy; and in observing that the word 'police' was so new that the English language had to borrow it from the French, he was indicating that this subject was historically recent. To 'civil government' it was becoming necessary to add the concept of *état bien policé*. But the French 'police' was enlarging its meaning from that of the government of large capital cities to that of ensuring that the produce of the countryside was conveyed into the towns; and it was this crucial activity that *The Wealth of Nations* indicated was better left to civil society than transacted by the state. If 'police' is one of the roots of the term 'political economy', its presence in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* helps to link *The Wealth of Nations* with the history of moral and social life.[31]

[29] Millar's account of Smith was incorporated by Dugald Stewart in his *Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, LL.D*; see Wightman, 1982, pp. 274–5.

[30] *LJ*, pp. 5–7, 398–9, 486–7.

[31] It is noteworthy that the notions of enforcing the law and invigilating the security of the state, which have come to dominate our use of the word 'police', are little discussed by Smith, though they were already important aspects of the work of French officials using that word.

Millar's 'gradual progress of jurisprudence from the rudest to the most refined ages' supplies us, early in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, with Smith's statement of the four stages, and by taking contemporary commerce as an end-point, we could move easily to treating them as forming a developmental scheme of 'the progress of society'. But when we first encounter them in the reports of Smith's lectures, they do not form a sequence of stages with its commencement at some moment in primitive time, so much as a heuristic device arrived at by pure conjecture[32] and presented in these terms. We are invited to imagine a human group of both sexes situated in an uninhabited island, and to suppose the natural order in which they would hit upon means of sustaining themselves; clearly, by the time they invent money as a convenient means of regulating the exchange of their surplus products, the original image of the desert island is quite worn out. Nor does Smith show any interest in saying that this may have been the human predicament following some biblical or extra-biblical catastrophe; it is simply a heuristic device, constructed for the purpose of explaining the remarkable diversity of human laws, even those contained within single systems of historically formed jurisprudence. We enter on the pursuit of *l'esprit des lois* when it is laid down that each of the four stages instigates its own cultural institutions and suggests its own regulatory procedures, and that to understand this enables us to explain and assign to their origins a great many of the laws by which we find ourselves governed. The assumption is clearly that any European society, as it might be Scotland or England, is governed by laws of considerable antiquity and heterogeneity, and that there may be framed an archaeology of jurisprudence which will explain how their many layers originated and have remained to the present; but there is no sign of a reductionist programme of assigning each and every law to the particular stage of society, singled out from among the original four, which once gave it its meaning. Nor is it suggested that the four stages necessarily occurred in a fixed order, so that a condition of society governed by one mode of sustenance gave way to one governed by another; the original desert island was a heuristic device leaving it perfectly possible that the several modes of sustenance may have overlapped and existed concurrently. The four stages of society, though their order is sequential, cumulative and progressive, are as yet at a considerable distance from forming an evolutionary history.

We perceive this happening as the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* engage with

[32] *LJ*, pp. 14–16, 459–60.

a series of broadly conceived patterns of origination or change, of which none is generated by the four-stage sequence itself but each may be illuminated by applying its pattern more or less directly. These include the formation of ancient city-state government;[33] the transformation of the Roman republic into empire and principate;[34] the settlement of the Germanic barbarians and the transition from allodial to feudal land tenures;[35] the decline of feudal society and the formation of the absolute monarchies;[36] and the exceptional case of the Stuart monarchy down to (but not beyond) the Revolution of 1688.[37] The presence of Hume is now and then to be felt in this sequence, but the great issue of spiritual, ecclesiastical and clerical authority is only marginally present; Smith's posture as an expositor of jurisprudence allows him to leave it aside, which may of course have been what he preferred to do. There is only one point at which one of the four stages makes its appearance in an originatory role. The successive waves of barbarians appearing in European history – the primitive Greeks themselves, the Germans, Goths and Vandals, the Huns, Tartars and Mongols – are considered representatives of the shepherd stage of society. Smith is interested by the writings of the Jesuit missionaries Lafitau and Charlevoix, who had studied the manners of the warlike hunters of North America;[38] but, in a way dark with consequences for the latter, he insists that they fall far behind the barbarians of the Old World, ancient or modern, since they remain fixed at the hunter stage and have developed no capacity for either the domestication of herd-beasts or the systematic tillage of the soil.[39] Here we see the concept of the savage taking shape, in ominous exclusion from the patterns of European progress; but Smith makes his crucial move in the role he assigns to the shepherd. In older systems of stadial theory, the shepherd was not far removed from the savage; his passive attendance on beasts he scarcely controlled cut him off from the universe of labour, and he was not uncommonly said to be indolent by choice. In a series of remarkable passages which continue into the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith insisted that the origins of property, government, class distinctions and art were to be found at the moment when pastoral chieftains began calling flocks and herds their own and commandeering the labour of those who drove them for them.[40] This

[33] *LJ*, pp. 221–6, 409–11. [34] *LJ*, pp. 229, 233–7, 240–1, 411–13.
[35] *LJ*, pp. 238–40, 244–55, 415–19. [36] *LJ*, pp. 257–65, 419–20.
[37] *LJ*, pp. 256–67, 327–30, 420–2, 436–7.
[38] *LJ*, pp. 20–1, 106, 201; Lafitau, 1724 and 1974; Charlevoix, 1744. [39] *LJ*, pp. 107, 459.
[40] *LJ*, pp. 20–2, 27, 39, 107, 202–5, 208–10, 213–22, 228–9, 404–8, 460; Campbell and Skinner, 1981, vol. II, pp. 711–15. Cf. Millar, 1806, pp. 57–66.

assignment to the shepherd of a more positive role than he had played before coincided, for a variety of reasons, with an increasing tendency among European scholars to identify him, not with the ineffective pipe-player of pastoral poetry, or even with the transhumant herdsman of the German forests or the Scottish highlands, but with the formidably destructive nomads of Central Asia, who had from time to time appeared in such numbers as to found transitory empires upon genocidal conquests. With this the image of the barbarian began to change; to the destructiveness of the nomad he added the shepherd's capacity to innovate beyond his immediate condition; and Smith was able to find the origins of both ancient Greek and medieval Gothic government in successive waves of pastoral incursion. Towards the end of his course we find him recorded as remarking

> In some former lectures, I have given you an account of most of the forms of government which have existed in Europe. 1st, that of shepherds in clans, and 2dly, that of those aristocraticall monarchies which arose out of these when settled in some certain spot, which have afterwards become first of all aristocracies and afterwards democracys. The Grecians were at first in the time of the Trojan war in the first or government of clans under a chief. The Germans also were long after in that state. All Europe before the conquest of the Romans, some small posts excepted, was under the republican government. Gaul was under an aristocraticall and partly under a republican government, where the aristocracies were under the hereditary nobles. So also was Spain. Italy was chiefly divided into small republican governments. I showed you also how that some republics came to have very great and extensive dominions, and that the ruin of these produced monarchys far greater than those from out of the government of the clans. – I showed you also how after the fall of the Roman Empire the government of Europe became at first allodial and afterward feudal, and explain'd the different sorts of government that were produced by the overthrow of this government in France, England, Germany, etc. It still however subsists in full rigour in Poland, Courland, etc. – This may make a pretty generall account of the history of government in Europe.[41]

The passage continues with an account of the rise of the modern (or medieval) republic, a trading corporation utterly unlike the ancient stronghold of self-transforming warriors; employing artisans instead of owning slaves, committed to productive instead of political activity (only slaveholders are capable of democracy), and able by its trade to transform the agrarian feudalism founded by the German invaders of Europe, who unlike other shepherds had proved capable of occupying

[41] *LJ*, pp. 287–8. Observe that 'eastern Europe' is represented by a Poland-Lithuania depicted as a feudal survival.

and appropriating land. There is then a sequence of shepherd, landowner and merchant, which supplies government in Europe with a history, but it has arisen late in the history of historiography itself, and its central function for Smith seems to be that of differentiating ancient Greco-Roman government from medieval and modern. Most noteworthy of all is Smith's observation that he has constructed 'a general account of the history of government in Europe', for this seems to be the first time in these lectures that he has used language suggesting either that government has a 'history' or that it is the purpose of 'history' to supply a continuous account of the development of government. We have come a long way since the four stages appeared as the purely 'natural' or 'conjectural' history of a group of castaways imagined on an island; 'the history of government in Europe' is a civil history supposed to happen in real time and occupy two thousand years.

And yet the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* were delivered concurrently with the *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*; the passage last quoted was dated by its reporter 'March 14, 1763',[42] and on the preceding 7 January the reporter of the lectures on rhetoric had taken note of a passage in which Smith remarked:

> Long demonstrations as they are no part of the historians province are seldom made use of by the ancients. The modern authors have brought them in. Historicall truths are now in much greater request than they ever were in the ancient times. One thing that has contributed to the increase of this curiosity is that there are now severall sects in Religion and politicall disputes which are greatly dependent on the truth of certain facts. This it is that has induced almost all historians for some time past to be at great pains in the proof of those facts on which the claims of the parties they favoured depended. These proofs however besides that they are inconsistent with the historicall stile, are likewise of bad consequence as they interrupt the thread of the narration, and that most commonly in the parts that are most interesting. They withdraw our attention from the main facts, and before we can get thro them they have so far weakened our concern for the issue of the affair that was broke off that we are never again so much interested in them.[43]

Smith had a clear understanding of how modern histories differed from ancient. It was not only the advent of a print culture – as Hume once suggested[44] – that obliged the modern to verify his facts and give his references; it was the change in culture that had made histories controversial and judicial, designed to press or to criticise the claims of

[42] *LJ*, p. 287. [43] *LRBL*, pp. 98 (date), 102.
[44] Miller ('Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations'), p. 422, n. 123.

legal or religious systems whose structure entailed a certain narrative and interpretation of the past, so that the authority of actors or principles in the present depended on the assertion that something had happened in the past while something else had not. In the passage just quoted, Smith was in a sense voicing the recurrent Enlightenment complaint against the disputatiousness of the moderns; instead of the edification of listening to an account of exemplary actions, instead of the agony and exaltation of finding one's sympathies intensely involved in the narrative – in Smith's judgment Tacitus was not so much a philosophical as a theatrical historian[45] – one must undergo the initially unrewarding labour of enquiring what had happened, why it mattered and even whether anything had happened at all. In his lectures on rhetoric, however, Smith did not make the *Encyclopédiste* move of rejecting humanist philology and humanist narrative together, and substituting a philosophy able to write history to suit itself. He retained the supremacy of neo-classical rhetoric and narrative, and exiled the critical digression from the narrative text – to where is another question. These are the lectures of a professor who is not free – though Smith and Millar were freer than most – to invent his own curriculum; and we should remember that the lectures on rhetoric and *belles-lettres*, though delivered from another chair than those on jurisprudence, were part of the same Enlightened programme in moral philosophy, since an ability to persuade and a cultivated style were not ornamental but part of the capacity to articulate and evaluate statements of the good life. Scottish Enlightenment was happening in the schools, not the salons; it was attentive to the texts and the authority of the cultural inheritance. But a respect for authority did not exclude a critical capacity to weigh the claims of authority; and when in his two concurrent lecture courses Smith seems – and must have seemed to those who heard both – to open an unbridgeable gap between history in the neo-classical sense and 'the history of government in Europe', he was clearly opening a problematic rather than closing it.

The digressions which could not be inserted in the narrative without interrupting it and diminishing its effect were in the first instance critical in the sense of verificatory; while narrating an action for its moral significance, one must ask for religious or legalist reasons whether it had in fact happened at all. Tedious this might be; but the critical enterprise had been enormously enlarged by Montesquieu, and the *Lectures on*

[45] *LRBL*, pp. 111–14 ('Such is the true Character of Tacitus which has been misrepresented by all his commentators from Boccalini down to Gordon'). Cf. Phillips, 1996.

Jurisprudence were committed to pursuing that enlargement, into an enquiry why and how systems of laws and manners had existed at various times, and continued to exist in the practice of jurisprudence, which had made the moral significance of actions historically diverse. Modern ethics laboured under the vast weight of historical information. It was of this enterprise that Millar was thinking when he wrote that Montesquieu 'was the Lord Bacon of this branch of philosophy. Dr Smith is the Newton.'[46] Voltaire and d'Alembert, rather far from being direct disciples of Montesquieu, made Bacon and Newton actors in their story, not analogues for action in a different story. What was happening, in the Glasgow lectures as elsewhere, was that 'this branch of philosophy' was organising information into 'history' in a new sense of the term: 'the history of government', 'the history of society'; but that Smith's use of 'the history of government' in his lectures on jurisprudence remained apparently at odds with the use of 'history' in his lectures on rhetoric and *belles-lettres*. It was possible at this point that 'the history of government' would remain a 'natural' or 'conjectural' history as these terms were to be used by Dugald Stewart; a heuristic device which might furnish the context necessary for the understanding of the text but must never insert itself into the latter. It was also possible, and indeed probable, that the sequential character of the 'stages of society' might combine with already existing macronarratives of legal, cultural and religious change to form a new kind of narrative – a narrative of 'the progress of society' – which would furnish 'history' with a new meaning, capable of competing with or annexing the old. The Enlightened veneration for neo-classical letters, however, perpetuated the autonomy of 'history' in the old sense, while the Enlightened determination to ground morality in a philosophy of human nature set limits to the construction of 'history' in the new. We are also at the point of encountering the deeply important, if tendentious and destructive, Enlightened discovery that the 'progress of society' and *les progrès de l'esprit humain* did not happen in the same way in all parts of the globe. The problems of narrative and digression, of 'history' in old senses and in new, therefore persisted, and Gibbon's organisation of the chapters of the *Decline and Fall* was one of many responses to them. We are now to consider some ways in which Smith and his Scottish contemporaries combined the sequence of four stages with other narratives of structural change so as to move 'history' some distance towards its new meaning, while at the

[46] Millar, 1818, vol. II, pp. 429–30, n.

same time constructing new histories of 'the progress of society in Europe' and Eurasia, from which the history of the Americas was to a significant degree excluded.

In the passage earlier quoted, Smith summarised two major patterns of historical change which he had constructed by combining the concept of the four stages with other narratives of European history. The first concerned ancient Mediterranean society: the formation of the Greek and Italian cities out of associations of clans and their chieftains, the formation of their capacity for conquest and empire, and the deformation of this capacity under the conditions created by its own success. This great theme looked back to Machiavelli, Harrington and Montesquieu, and forward to Gibbon and his choice of a subject; it had also figured in Hume's *Essays*. It is part of the long struggle of European culture with its own love of its Mediterranean past, and also of the constant Enlightened need to vindicate the superiority of modern commercial civilisation in the face of incessant neo-republican challenges to its values. Within this debate, it will be found, Smith developed in the *Lectures on Jurisprudence* and continued in the *Wealth of Nations* a critique of city-state civilisation as driven to conquest, and as unable to sustain itself within the empires created by conquest, under the imperatives of an agrarian economy worked by slavery and lacking an internal market. The criticism of antiquity was therefore part of the creation of the most recent modernity. More immediate to the purposes of the present chapter, however, is the fact that Smith's account of the formation of classical society begins at the shepherd stage of conjectural history. Pastoral lords form the aristocracies of ancient republics, and slave-owning democracies take shape with the development of agriculture; and though this sequence takes a unique course in the cities of Greece and Rome, something like the same social structure is common to all barbaric Europe before the Roman empire. Smith does not go further back in search of the hunter-gatherer stage; 'Europe' at its inception is barbarian, but not savage.

The second of Smith's major patterns of change involved the beginning and end of the forms of government and society we call medieval. Here too the initiative was originally taken by shepherds. The invading barbarians were Germanic or Gothic pastoralists, thrust on by the more formidable because more highly organised nomads coming out of the Eurasian plains, but already possessed of a crude capacity for agriculture, and therefore capable both of partitioning the lands they seized and of interacting with the more complex societies they found in the

Roman provinces, where slavery was already giving place to serfdom. Allodial tenures involving service but not vassalage gave place to feudal, and here we seem to find the intellectual scaffolding behind Hume's and Robertson's contention that European feudalism took shape between the ninth and eleventh centuries, bringing civil society to a nadir of disintegration distinct from that reached as an immediate consequence of the barbarian settlements themselves. For Hume as well as for Voltaire, this regression coincided with the appearance of papal authority at its most aggressive, but Smith, even more conspicuously than Robertson, shows little concern to trace the ecclesiastical dimension of European history; there seems to have been something in the Moderate enterprise (assuming Smith to partake of it at this point) which held back from confronting the issues of clerical and spiritual authority. The decay of feudalism proper leads to the great households of retainers which, for Smith as for Hume and Robertson, form the last phase of barbaric police and political economy; and it is the function of both constitutional and absolute monarchy to disperse these households and substitute an aristocracy of investment for one of conspicuous consumption. This is an important move towards the establishment of a commercial society, and we are at a point where we can see with John Millar how it was that Smith proceeded towards the writing of the *Wealth of Nations*, but left unfinished his comprehensive work on the history of society in all its ramifications. His interest in that history was highly selective; he chose to attend to the history of Europe, down to the origins of commercial society, excluding the history of the church from any primary consideration; and on the whole he left 'history' where Dugald Stewart said he had placed it, in the role of a heuristic device needed to organise information to be treated by other disciplines, ranging from moral philosophy to political economy. This, which seems almost to align him with d'Alembert, in no way prevented him from being the author of historical generalisations which played a major part in transforming the discipline of history itself.

SECTION VI

Adam Ferguson: the Moderate as Machiavellian

CHAPTER 22

Ferguson's Essay: *Siberia as the cradle of world history*

We are now in a position to see how a system including the scheme of the four stages of social development, originating as and remaining a 'natural history' subservient to the discipline of moral philosophy, became the source of generalisations of increasing historical complexity which pervaded and came close to annexing the concept of history itself. Adam Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* – the title itself should by now be enough to catch the reader's eye – was first published in 1767. Its author was one of the founding group of Edinburgh Moderates, and had succeeded Hume as Librarian to the Faculty of Advocates in 1757, subsequently assuming the professorships of natural and moral philosophy in the university of Edinburgh. We are therefore at some distance from the Glasgow milieu, where Smith had resigned his professorships three years before the *Essay*, and need not think of Ferguson as deriving from Smith or Millar the concept of four stages which he shared with them and derived from many sources; the use which he made of this construct was distinctively his own. He resembled Smith and Millar in employing the history of society as an organising principle within a scheme of moral philosophy; but his moral philosophy was not organised as jurisprudence and it is difficult to read the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* as issuing like Millar's *Origin of Ranks* from a series of university lectures. It is a consciously crafted literary text, and the genre to which it belongs is that of the moral essay. Ferguson's moral philosophy, furthermore, was highly individual, different enough from that of Edinburgh Moderates or Glasgow professors to make David Hume more than doubtful whether it ought to be published, though he rejoiced in its success when it was.[1]

Ferguson was something like a vitalist; the organising principle of his

[1] Greig, 1932, vol. II, p. 212.

moral philosophy was human energy and the heroic and creative, if sometimes dangerous, vitality which it displayed when moulded and directed by society. He therefore emphasised the barbaric vigour of primitive man – or rather, confronted by the Tacitean formula that the savage alternated between explosive energy and fits of indolence, he emphasised what it was that such a being could do in his manic periods; and since his study began with *virtù* – for this was one of that term's meanings – it is no wonder that it ended with a portrayal of corruption. By contrast, the predominant Enlightened thinkers, including Hume, Robertson and Smith, looked on undifferentiated primal energy as barbaric and dangerous, and on the progress of society as the progressive diversification of human nature into the multifarious specialised pursuits of a commercial civilisation, where they would become refined, reflective, moderate and even – though it was dangerous to say so – feminised. 'Le commerce adoucit les moeurs barbares', Montesquieu had written; 'il corrompt les moeurs pures.'[2] Ferguson did not differ from this view of progress, or from the four-stage scheme which was its expression; but he insisted throughout that it was agonal and creative energy or virtue which was to be canalised and directed, and that the progress of society might destroy itself if it destroyed energy. This jeremiad tendency might seem to bring him close to Rousseau, but he chose to emphasise the heroic and active savage of the temperate and arctic zones, not the innocent and inert savage of the tropics. The mainstream of Enlightened thinking, however, was so insistent that human energies developed only through the appropriation that led towards refinement as to at times deny the savage any libido at all. Ferguson remained, as he saw primeval man as being, something of a maverick.

It will be noted that this was a debate over the nature of the 'savage', a term of complicated ancestry and dismal future, which had developed from a medieval image of the 'wild man' of the woods, the *selvaggio* or *sauvage*, to a place in four-stage theory where it became identical with the hunter who neither herded nor cultivated, and might be found in a variety of habitats from the ice-floe to the outback, as well as in the forest with which he was identified. The term might still denote the individual of juristic theory, at the point of quitting the solitary 'state of nature' for the state of society; but Ferguson, like most of his contemporaries, rejected this model and denied that any human could possibly be found

[2] *Esprit des lois*, book XX, ch.1; Cohler, Miller and Stone, 1989, p. 338.

who was not already a social being. It was society, Ferguson wrote, that made individuals what they were, and what they derived from society was not the moderation but the enhancement of their energies.

> Mere acquaintance and habitude nourish affection, and the experience of society brings every passion of the human mind upon its side. Its triumphs and prosperities, its calamities and distresses, bring a variety and a force of emotion, which can only have place in the company of our fellow-creatures. It is here that a man is made to forget his weakness, his cares of safety, and his subsistence, and to act from those passions which make him discover his force. It is here he finds that his arrows fly swifter than the eagle, and his weapons wound deeper than the paw of the lion, or the tooth of the boar. It is not alone his sense of a support which is near, nor the love of distinction in the opinion of his tribe, that inspire his courage, or swell his heart with a confidence that exceeds what his natural force should bestow. Vehement passions of animosity or attachment are the first exertions of vigour in his breast; under their influence, every consideration, but that of his object, is forgotten; dangers and difficulties only excite him the more.
>
> That condition is surely favourable to the nature of any being, in which his force is increased; and if courage be the gift of society to man, we have reason to consider his union with his species as the noblest part of his fortune. From this source are derived, not only the force, but the very existence of his happiest emotions; not only the better part, but almost the whole of his rational character. Send him to the desert alone, he is a plant torn from its roots; the form indeed may remain, but every faculty droops and withers; the human personage and the human character cease to exist.[3]

Ferguson set out to write the history of this mode of selfhood and self-affirmation, through the numerous stages of the progress of society. He intended an essay on the history of civil society, not an attempt to write that history itself, which at the moment could be adumbrated only in a theoretical or conjectural form. With this he was by no means satisfied, both because he distrusted the method of conjecture,[4] and because

> the history of mankind is confined within a limited period, and from every quarter brings an intimation that human affairs have had a beginning. Nations, distinguished by the possession of arts, and the felicity of their political establishments, have been derived from a feeble original, and still preserve in their story the indications of a slow and gradual progress, by which this distinction was gained. The antiquities of every people, however diversified, and however disguised, contain the same information on this point.[5]

[3] *Essay*, p. 23 (part first, section III).
[4] *Essay*, pp. 75–6 (part second, section I).
[5] *Essay*, p. 74.

All stories were versions of the same story, and yet it could only be synthetically written. Human history might descend from a single moment, but this could only be characterised as a stage of development; and precisely because all societies shared and even remembered a common history it could only be recounted in innumerable forms of the same narrative. This might be the reason why a unified history of civil society could be considered but never written, and perhaps why Adam Smith never completed the grand synthesis of the history of jurisprudence we are told he intended. Adam Ferguson, very similarly, rejected a conjectural history which arrived by subtraction at an abstract state of nature, and insisted that history could begin only with human beings already in society. But that society must be such as could exist in the earliest state of their existence which theory could supply: the hunting or savage state, which was the nearest thing possible to the state of nature historised. In that state the explosion of human energy and selfhood which was triggered by society had already occurred; Ferguson's might be called a big-bang theory of history, which went on to enquire what became of human energy as society progressed. Once he had insisted, however, that history was finite and had a beginning, he must look for points at which its narrative might at least plausibly begin, and here he and his contemporaries were better furnished with information than the jurists and philosophers of the seventeenth century. Hobbes and Locke, in their several ways, had declared that 'in the beginning all the world was America',[6] and the state of nature could even in their day be historised as the condition of American hunters and 'savages'; but there was available to Ferguson a wealth of descriptions of Native American society, from Spanish, French and English sources, from which a natural if not a narrative history of American mankind could be constructed.

There was further available, this time from the expanding Russian empire, a body of literature describing the hunting, herding and farming peoples of Siberia and Central Asia, from the first of whom the peoples of the Americas might be descended; and it is of some importance that Ferguson set out to combine these sources of information.

> From one to the other extremity of America; from Kamschatka westward to the river Oby, and from the Northern sea, over that length of country, to the confines of China, of India, and Persia; from the Caspian to the Red sea, with little exception, and from thence over the inland continent and the western shores of Africa; we everywhere meet with nations on whom we bestow the

[6] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, vol. I, 13 (ed. Tuck, 1991, p. 89); Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, vol. II, 49 (ed. Laslett, 1988, p. 301).

appellations of barbarous or savage. That extensive tract of the earth, containing so great a variety of situation, climate and soil, should, in the manners of its inhabitants, exhibit all the diversities which arise from the unequal influence of the sun, joined to a different nourishment and manner of life. Every question, however, on this subject is premature, till we have first endeavoured to form some general conception of our species in its rude state, and have learned to distinguish mere ignorance from dullness, and the want of arts from the want of capacity.[7]

Here is a new way of organising human history; very far from Smith's conjectural desert island, and derived less from the oceanic expansion of the Europeans of the Atlantic coastlands than from the continental expansion of the Romanov state, and for that reason closer to Voltaire's patterns of history. It expands his conception of *le nord* into an *officina gentium* of vast extent, at once Eurasian, Afro-Asian and Asian-American; and though it is said to contain 'all the diversities' of human society, it is framed so as to marginalise both the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt and the interior of sub-Saharan Africa, while holding the dynamic peoples of Atlantic Europe in a reserve from which they will issue to dominate the planet. The area delineated contains the history of savagery and barbarism, roughly identical with the first two of the four stages, and to be determined by the combined – and very diversely combined – causal factors of climate and culture. The choice of the verb 'should' informs us that the 'history' of these vast regions is to be primarily a natural or conjectural history, a schematisation in developmental order of the 'diversities' of human nature which Ferguson as moral philosopher proposes to undertake. But there is also a narrative or civil 'history of mankind' which could be written had we the knowledge at our disposal, and in this the hunting and herding peoples of Asia, America and Africa might be shown playing the part, first in the transition from one stage to another, conceived as occurring in real time, second in the civil histories on record as occurring in the zones of advanced civilisation on the margins of the heartland Ferguson describes. It was to be of fatal importance that the Asian sector of this heartland was said to belong to the 'Old World', America to the 'New'. This idiom, arising from the discourse of discovery and colonisation, was to produce the assumption that history, of all the kinds presupposed in Ferguson's language, must first have occurred in the 'Old World' and thence passed – or alternatively failed to pass – to the 'New'. We are about to consider for the first time the negative impact of these ways of

[7] *Essay*, pp. 80–1 (part second, section II).

thinking and writing upon the history of the Americas.

The *Essay on the History of Civil Society* proceeds to explore the characteristics of humanity in the 'savage' state, using that term with relatively little emotional or dramatic load and identifying it as rigorously as possible with hunting cultures. The savage is no longer the 'natural' man who existed before society; there was never any such thing as a pre-social condition and

> if we are asked therefore, Where the state of nature is to be found? we may answer, It is here; and it matters not whether we are understood to speak in the island of Great Britain, at the Cape of Good Hope, or the Straits of Magellan."[8]

He – and the masculine pronoun is important – has learned as little as possible which may differentiate him from other predatory species, beyond the use of language, the complex social combinations and the capacity to make artefacts, which give him skills in hunting which the beasts have not. But this is already a model framed by conjectural history; it is hard to find a culture which subsists by hunting and nothing else, and she makes her appearance when we notice that there are few hunting societies which do not plant edible vegetables around their huts – the word 'agriculture' may be too dignified for this crude activity. Labour of this kind, in addition to domestic and progenitive labour, is commonly left to the women; and Ferguson proceeds to develop the argument that in societies of this sort the condition of women is commonly servile. We are on the margins of the debate touched off by the increasing literacy of women in commercial society and Ferguson is considering the problem, occasioned by the premise of female slavery among 'savages', that appropriation, and therefore civil society, are held to begin with cultivation of the soil. Why then were they not invented and created by women?

> As the fur and the bow pertain to the individual
>
> – who is male –
>
> the cabbin and its utensils are appropriated to the family; and as the domestic cares are committed to the women, so the property of the household seems likewise to be vested in them . . . The hunter and the warrior are numbered by the matron as a part of her treasure; they are reserved for perils and trying occasions
>
> – the materials of classical history –

[8] *Essay*, p. 14 (part first, section I).

and in the recess of public councils, in the intervals of war, are maintained by the cares of the women, and loiter about in mere amusement or sloth.

While one sex continue to value themselves chiefly on their courage, their talent for policy, and their warlike atchievements, this species of property which is bestowed on the other, is in reality a mask of subjection; not, as some writers alledge, of their having acquired an ascendant. It is the care and trouble of a subject with which the warrior does not chuse to be embarrassed. It is servitude, and a continual toil, where no honours are won; and they whose province it is, are in fact the slaves and the helots of their country.[9]

This state of affairs may vary with the climate.

The female sex domineers on the frontiers of Louisiana, by the double engine of superstition, and of passion. They are slaves among the native inhabitants of Canada and chiefly valued for the toils they endure, and the domestic service they yield.[10]

Ferguson, however, prefers culture to climate, and in the dismal account of the condition of women he has just given may be seen a separation between politics and history on the one hand and civil society on the other. With the advent of herding, horse-riding males will proclaim themselves lords over property, and history will become the record of their deeds in its defence and extension; with the advent of the ox and the plough, males will appropriate land and law will become the scheme of relations between landholding patriarchs. Politics, history and the subjection and exclusion of women, however, have made their appearance at the hunter stage of society; they are created by men, less as hunters than as warriors. There are already such phenomena as 'public councils' and a 'talent for policy'; women take no part in them; and they are produced by the activity, not of hunting but of warfare. Hunter society, therefore, is not incapable of generating a 'public' dimension.

At this point Ferguson's account of 'savage' society begins to move from the Siberian to the American theatre. His references, such as they are, recurrently direct the reader to the Jesuit writers Lafitau and Charlevoix of the Canadian missions,[11] who had described Native American warrior cultures in such detail that Lafitau had been able to discover the virtues of Homeric heroes in the Huron and the Seneca, and conversely the characteristics of 'savagery' in the Homeric Greeks; and with them we find mentioned Cadwallader Colden's *History of the Five Nations*, a major source of information about the Iroquois confederacy.[12] From these authors in particular, Ferguson built up his account of savagery: the subjection of women, followed by the central paradox with which he wished to deal, namely the incomplete character of dynamic social energy under hunter-gatherer conditions. Because the male hunter found his energies only intermittently employed in the absence of daily agricultural labour, he exhibited paradoxical characteristics, alternating between energy and sloth, skill and improvidence. Labour was of course the lot of women, and civil government and society would appear only when cultivation extended it to males; but there was a sense in which the public and the political preceded civil government and police, because the energies released by social combination found expression in the practice of war and the emotions of solidarity with the group which it engendered. These activities of body and mind provided the savage male with his awareness of the self and its values, and women, because excluded from these, seemed to him of no value at all.

[9] *Essay*, p. 82 (part second, section II). [10] *Essay*, pp. 112–13 (part third, section I).
[11] Above, p. 321, n. 38. Charlevoix was also the author of a history of Paraguay; Imbruglia, 1983.

This was how he arrived at what in other states of society would be considered a sense of *raison d'état* and *jus gentium*. Families may be seen becoming

the parts of a canton; the women assemble to plant their maize; the old men go to council, the huntsman and the warrior joins the youth of his village in the field. Many such cantons assemble to constitute a national council, or to execute a national enterprise. When the Europeans made their first settlements in America, six such nations had formed a league, had their amphyctiones or states-general, and, by the firmness of their union, and the ability of their councils, had obtained an ascendancy from the mouth of the St Laurence to that of the Mississippi. They appeared to understand the objects of the confederacy, as well as those of the separate nation; they studied a balance of power; the statesman of one country watched the designs and proceedings of another; and occasionally threw the weight of his tribe into a different scale. They had their alliances and their treaties, which, like the nations of Europe, they maintained, or they broke, upon reasons of state; and remained at peace from a sense of necessity or expediency, and went to war upon any emergence of provocation or jealousy.

Thus, without any settled form of government, or any bond of union, but what resembled more the suggestion of instinct than the invention of reason, they conducted themselves with the concert, and the force, of nations.[13]

The full rationality of their statecraft may be doubted because their capacity for deliberation is in excess of their capacity for action. The sachems in council can send out only war-parties capable of raids, not armies capable of battle; they resemble Homer's Achaeans, who could

[12] Colden, 1747. [13] *Essay*, p. 85 (part second, section II).

form a confederacy and lay siege to Troy, but could not obtain a decisive military result; and in consequence the sagacity of their councils has its limitations. Ferguson, however, is not far from the position of the English colonial governor Thomas Pownall, who had affirmed that the forest hunting peoples were entirely capable of entering into treaties, and fighting just or unjust wars, over the demarcation of their hunting-grounds;[14] and from Canada to New Zealand, the capacity to enter into treaties possessed by, imputed or denied to indigenous peoples has been a key element in their colonial and post-colonial situation.[15] This capacity, however, has been spoken of with greater assurance in proportion as the peoples concerned have been seen as able to apportion lands among themselves; and this has tended to move the definition of civility away from the hunting towards the more settled conditions. Ferguson, who shared with Pownall the opinion that hunting nations possessed a federative capacity, was to be a firm opponent of American claims in the Revolutionary War; Hume, Smith and possibly Robertson were perhaps more open to the colonists' assertion that, as Lockean societies formed through appropriation of the *terra nullius* by agriculture and industry, they possessed a claim to civil sovereignty with which neither crown nor indigenous peoples could compete.[16]

Nevertheless, this is a point from which we may trace Ferguson's moving back from a North American towards a North Asian model, in pursuit of the progress of society. He did not do this because he desired – as Robertson perhaps did – to relegate Americans to a condition of unredeemed savagery. He had ascribed to them a capacity to form confederations, and this is enough to bring them within the formula:

> From the descriptions contained in the last section, we may incline to believe, that mankind, in their simplest state, are on the eve of erecting republics. Their love of equality, their habit of assembling in public councils, and their zeal for the tribe to which they belong, are qualifications that fit them to act under that species of government; and they seem to have but a few steps to make, in order to reach its establishment. They have only to define the numbers of which their councils shall consist, and to settle the forms of their meeting: They have only to bestow a permanent authority for repressing disorders, and to enact a few rules in favour of that justice they have already acknowledged, and from inclination so strictly observe.[17]

But these steps from the eve of the republic to the republic itself occur only when or after we find mankind

[14] Pownall, 1768, pp. 259–60 and note.
[15] Williams, 1990; Sharp, 1990; McHugh, 1991; Tully, 1995.
[16] See Tully, 1993.
[17] *Essay*, pp. 97–8 (part second, section III).

> passing from the savage to what may be called the barbarous state. Members of the same community enter into quarrels of competition or revenge. They unite in following leaders, who are distinguished by their fortunes, and by the lustre of their birth. They join the desire of spoil with the love of glory; and from an opinion, that what is acquired by force, justly pertains to the victor, they become hunters of men, and bring every contest to the decision of the sword.[18]

If barbarians are bands of robbers, more predatory than any savage, it is because some progress has been made towards the definition of property, and what makes them plunder their neighbours drives them at the same time to establish laws among themselves; this is why brigand chiefs like Theseus and Romulus are presented in the role of legislators. The development of property is described in terms of the four stages, the appropriation of herds preceding the appropriation of lands; and it may be because there is never a fixed and invariable succession of one stage to another that Ferguson looks about for some area of the earth's surface in which they may be seen existing together. The chapter we are considering begins:

> It was a proverbial imprecation in use among the hunting nations on the confines of Siberia, That their enemy might be obliged to live like a Tartar, and be seized with the folly of herding and attending his cattle. Nature, it seems, in their apprehension, by storing the woods and the desert with game, rendered the task of the herdsman unnecessary, and left to man only the trouble of selecting and of seizing his prey.[19]

And Robertson, in his *History of America*, mentions a parallel malediction:

> The Tartar, accustomed to roam over extensive plains, and to subsist on the product of his herds, imprecates upon his enemy, as the greatest of all curses, that he may be condemned to reside in one place, and to be nourished with the top of a weed.[20]

The lands in the centre and north of the Old World, of which Russian expansion was now furnishing descriptions, contained from north to south forest hunters, steppe and desert herdsmen, and black-soil agriculturalists, so that all three stages could be said to exist simultaneously and the movement from savagery to barbarism observed in all its diversity. In the two Americas, however, the theory of four stages constituting the history of civil society encountered its limitations. Native Americans had not domesticated flocks and herds; the horse-riding cultures of the Great Plains – products of European impact – were not yet noticed by European writers; the cultivation of vegetables had not yet passed beyond village horticulture to the arable stage in which tillage generated

[18] *Essay*, p. 97.
[19] *Essay*, pp. 94–5 (part second, section II).
[20] *Works*, VIII, p. 85.

property. The European philosopher was faced with a choice. He might say that the progress of society had not occurred in the continents of the New World; he might find some new theory in which it progressed through a different series of stages; or he might join Rousseau in regarding the paradigm of progress – even the paradigm of history – as itself open to criticism. Ferguson, though he knew of Rousseau's writings and was conscious of the possibility that the primary energy released by socialisation might be corrupted and lost as society grew more complex and self-absorbed, nevertheless adopted the first of these options; it is hard to find any Enlightened philosopher who adopted the second and went beyond the history of Europe. He presented the Americas as having most probably been settled by Old World hunter peoples moving through Siberia and Kamschatka into the north of the continent, who had remained in the savage condition without proceeding to the barbarian. The meaning of this is illustrated by his references to the history of other continents; the 'Hottentots', often presented as a primitive set of food-gatherers, are allowed to be shepherds and therefore to resemble 'in many things the barbarian(s) of Europe', with 'rudiments of policy and a national vigour' beyond anything displayed by 'the other African tribes, who are exposed to the more vertical rays of the sun'.[21] It sounds as if the Hottentots are of lighter complexion. In northern Asia, beginning to appear the cradle of social development, the expanding Russian state sends out surveyors and cartographers, rather than armies, to annex tribes with whom they scarcely exchange a word.

It appears, however, that on the shores of the Eastern sea, they have met with nations who have questioned their title to reign, and who have considered the requisition of a tax as the demand of effects for nothing. Here perhaps may be found the genius of ancient Europe, and under its name of ferocity, the spirit of national independence; that spirit which disputed its ground in the West with the victorious armies of Rome, and baffled the attempts of the Persian monarchs to comprehend the villages of Greece within the bounds of their extensive dominion.[22]

A footnote identifies the recalcitrant nations as 'the Tchutzi'. It would be useful to know whether Ferguson's source – not identified – presents the Chukchi (as we might spell the name) as a hunting or a herding people. Iroquois or Chickasaw might have issued the same challenge to mapmakers and tax-gatherers; but a footnote to 'national independence' refers us to the history of the Tartars, and the sentence following associates the Gauls, Germans and Caledonians resisting Rome with the heroes of Marathon and Thermopylae. We have returned to Adam Smith's assertion that the barbarian village and the Mediterranean polis were alike in origin, and that both were founded by pastoral clansmen recently settled in an environment increasingly conducive to agriculture. Not only national independence, but the institutions of liberty, were of barbarian origin; and the Greeks and Romans, who had once defined 'barbarians' as those other than themselves, were now included in that category.

[21] *Essay*, p. 114. Kalb, 1731, had depicted the Hottentots as a culture of herdsmen; see Smith, *LJ*, p. 538. [22] *Essay*, p. 110 (part third, section i).

For Ferguson, as for Smith, there were two occasions on which the thrust of shepherd peoples westward had fertilised European history: one when the settlement of clans had produced the polis, the other when Gothic and Germanic settlement on Roman farmlands had produced the movement through allodial into feudal tenures and the subsequent formation of nations and states. The second history had recapitulated the former, and indeed all preceding stages of history.

The modern race, who came abroad to the possession of cultivated provinces, retained the arts they had practiced at home: the new master hunted the boar, or pastured his herds, where he might have raised a plentiful harvest: he built a cottage in the view of a palace: he buried in one common ruin, the edifices, sculptures, paintings and libraries, of the former inhabitant: he made a settlement upon a plan of his own, and opened anew the source of inventions, without perceiving from a distance to what length their progress might lead his posterity. The cottage of the present race, like that of the former, by degrees enlarged its dimensions; public buildings acquired a magnificence in a new taste. Even this taste came, in a course of ages, to be exploded, and the people of Europe recurred to the models which their fathers destroyed, and wept over the ruins which they could not restore.[23]

'The modern race' are the barbarians settled among the Romans, and we see here the barbarian defined as vandal, by his relation to a past high culture he has helped to destroy. He is, however, permitted his own creativity, and we can even find in this passage one of the few Enlightened recognitions that Gothic cathedral architecture may be viewed with respect. What is outstandingly absent from Ferguson's account is the independent role of the Christian clergy, secular and regular, whether viewed with abhorrence or with admiration; this theme, of obsessive concern to French and English Enlightenment and to Hume, is strangely and perhaps significantly neglected in the Scottish

[23] *Essay*, pp. 162–3 (part third, section vii).

universities, and we have found even Robertson restricted in his treatment of it. The history of priesthoods is marginal to the stadial history of civil society.

Robertson's *View of the Progress of Society in Europe* appeared two years after Ferguson's *Essay*, and we have to remember that the former is part of a *History of Charles V*, while the latter is what it says it is, an essay on the history of civil society, serving Ferguson's main purpose of expounding a moral philosophy. This does not require him to give – even though he must recognise its importance – a detailed history of the movement from barbarian to civilised, from the second to the third and fourth stages of society. It is possible to see that it entails the growth of agriculture and commerce, the useful and polite arts, and civil government operating in a multiplicity of states. These have taken shape in Europe partly in consequence of its insular and peninsular configuration –

> clusters of islands, a continent divided by many natural barriers, great rivers, ridges of mountains, and arms of the sea [24]

– but even more in consequence of jealousy and emulation between nations, which has produced a 'balance of power' even in the hunting confederations of North America, and has

> more than the Rhine and the Ocean, than the Alps and the Pyrenees in modern Europe – more than the straits of Thermopylae, the mountains of Thrace, or the bays of Salamine and Corinth in ancient Greece; tended to prolong the separation, to which the inhabitants of these happy climates have owed their felicity as nations, the lustre of their fame, and their civil accomplishments.[25]

Geography determines what humans can do, but culture determines what they do do, with their terrestrial situation. The American continents were settled by the hunting tribes of the Eurasian *officina gentium*, and the history of civil society did not go beyond the condition of savagery. The history of Europe begins with the colonisation by shepherd peoples of an environment conducive to agriculture and commerce, fertilised by rivers, divided by mountains and in contact with the sea, which they cultivated until they had ceased to be shepherds and could disregard all the natural barriers that had stimulated their individuality. They could not have done this if they had not been shepherds in the first place; but in the heartland of pastoral culture, which many of them had left behind

[24] *Essay*, pp. 116–17. [25] *Essay*, pp. 117–18 (part third, section 1).

> there is scarcely a people in the vast continent of Asia who deserves the name of a nation,

– though this has earlier been accorded to the Chukchi.

> The unbounded plain is traversed at large by hordes, who are in perpetual motion, or who are displaced and harassed by their mutual hostilities. Although they are never perhaps actually blended together[26] in the course of hunting, or in the search of pasture, they cannot bear one great distinction of nations, which is taken from the territory, and which is deeply impressed by an affection to the native seat. They move in troops, without the arrangement or the concert of nations; they become easy accessions to every new empire among themselves, or to the Chinese and Muscovite, with whom they hold a traffic for the means of subsistence and the materials of pleasure.[27]

The post-modern reader may wonder whether we are sentencing ourselves to a similar nomadic existence in cyberspace; but Ferguson at the outset of what we term modernity is in search of its roots in history. South and east of the Eurasian zone lie the great civilisations of Persia, India and China, where urban life was held to have developed in the direction of palace-centred despotism, but he disregards them[28] in search of a despotism which originates precisely where freedom has developed. The nomad horseman is certainly not a peasant tied to the soil, but because he lacks any property in the earth he can be reduced to the mere instrument of any chief powerful enough to command him, even in the feudal societies he has founded by becoming partly stationary. Hume's account of the Tudors is mentioned here.

> This calamity threatened Europe for ages, under the conquest and settlement of its new inhabitants. It has actually taken place in Asia, where similar conquests have been made; and even without the ordinary opiates of effeminacy, or a servile weakness, founded on luxury, it has surprised the Tartar on his wain, in the rear of his herds. Among these people, in the heart of a great continent, bold and enterprising warriors arose: they subdued, by surprise, or superior abilities, contiguous hords; they gained, in their progress, accessions of numbers and of strength; and, like a torrent increasing as it descends, became too strong for any bar that could be opposed to their passage. The conquering tribe, during a succession of ages, furnished the prince with his guards; and while they themselves were allowed to share in its spoils, were the voluntary tools of oppression. In this manner have despotism and corruption made their way into regions so much renowned for the wild freedom of nature: a power

[26] The sentence would make better sense if it were emphasised that they were so blended.
[27] *Essay*, p. 117.
[28] For what there is on Indian and Chinese government see *Essay*, p. 109. It suggests less a personal despotism than an absolute supremacy of 'police' over liberty.

which was the terror of every effeminate province is disarmed, and the nursery of nations is itself gone to decay.[29]

This is the fullest account we have yet seen of how the heartland of pastoral culture had ceased to be the centre of world history. A footnote at this point reads: 'See the *History of the Huns*.' Ferguson's references are seldom explicit enough to meet the rigorous standards of Robertson or Gibbon, but the allusion may well be to de Guignes's *Histoire des Huns, Turcs et Mogols*. If it is, Ferguson should be acquainted with the interesting circumstance that the Manchu lords of the steppe, originally just such conquerors as are here described, had been civilised by Confucian politeness into becoming benign Sons of Heaven instead of Oriental despots. The ruler depicted here is indeed not Sardanapalus or Amurath, immured within his palace and surrounded by guards, ministers and women whom he dare not trust; he is rather Nimrod, the mighty hunter and shepherd king who can hunt and herd humans as if they were beasts,[30] just as Attila, Genghiz and Timur came to do in modern history; but if Nimrod built a palace, Sardanapalus he would become, just as Caesar had become Tiberius, Nero or Elagabalus. There remained the question whether the Muscovite and Chinese empires to which the last shepherds were submitting were themselves despotisms, and what the answer might mean for the history of Europe.

The true Oriental despot was held to be the ruler of an agrarian society, one however in which the cultivator was supposed to have no rights of tenure whatever, but to hold at the will of his lord to whom he was enserfed or enslaved; every tenant, furthermore, whether peasant or baron, must be servile in his relation to the monarch. Montesquieu had envisaged this form of despotism, using Turkish and Persian evidence, and Voltaire was already saying that he found it extremely implausible; extensive cultivated territories simply could not be governed unless the tenant felt secure enough to stay on the land where he laboured. Ferguson was clearly supposing a characteristically Eurasian blend of pastoral and agricultural conditions; the despot ruled a subject peasantry by means of a force of horsemen fed, stabled and paid around his serai or palace. But as history moved west into Europe, and found its home there, land tenures generated systems of law by which they must be governed; feudalism contended with despotism – admittedly with

[29] *Essay*, p. 102. The Tudors appear in a note.

[30] Such beings occur in modern European writing as far back as Machiavelli; *Discourses on Livy*, vol. I, xxvi.

varying success, as the case of the Tudors indicated; and goods and money could circulate to the point where a commercial society became possible. The arts could flourish, and a system of states could arise, diversified into trading republics, constitutional monarchies, and monarchies which were absolute but not despotic. Unlike Hume and Robertson, Ferguson did not find it necessary to narrate the recent history of civil society at this climactic stage, but he is presupposing it.

CHAPTER 23

The Mémoires littéraires *and the* Remains of Japhet

There is a point from which the *Essay on the History of Civil Society* turns back from conjectural history to its original character as a discourse upon morality; it is less necessary to recount the rise of civility and enlightenment than to explore the ethics of human life under these conditions. The reader is not to forget, however, that among his duties as man and citizen – women are not much addressed at this stage – is the maintenance of society in the condition which makes a moral life possible. He must learn to practise liberty as it exists in advanced societies, distinct from the wild independence of the savage or the barbarian; but he needs to remember under these conditions the lesson he learned at the primitive stage, that his liberty depends upon his possession of himself, that is of the energies and virtues released in him by the experience of primary socialisation. The continuing emphasis on *virtù* in the Greek and Roman sense, the practice and preservation of the autonomous selfhood of the citizen, is what renders Ferguson as much a Stoic as a Christian; and it is what sets a certain distance between him and Hume or Smith. All three were aware that the independence of the citizen and legally protected proprietor enabled him, in a society increasingly commercial, to generate a whole new range of activities, productive, distributive and functional, in which some must engage to the point where they became specialised and engrossed in them, and their social relations were those they maintained with others specialising in other activities. All three recognised that in these conditions the individual might come to recognise himself only in the specialised role assigned to him by society – that of the professional soldier, for example, that of the acquisitive entrepreneur or the leisured consumer who paid the soldier, or that of the labourer condemned to necessary toil – and might cease to be his own master, capable of equality with other individuals who were masters of themselves. Hume and Smith, however, stressed the enormous gains, both material and moral, which

accrued to the personality as the diversification of society multiplied its possible capacities, and were relatively though cautiously sanguine about the prospects of managing the political relations between commercial individuals so that their liberty would be preserved. Ferguson was less sanguine; his understanding of morality was such as to convince him that the individual was free only so long as he remained virtuous, and virtuous only so long as he remained 'possessed of himself'.[31] This self-possession was the precondition of the occasionally necessary sacrifice of the self to the public good, with which sacrifice it should not be too eagerly identified.

Ferguson's thinking, then, was 'republican' in the sense – and only in the sense – that he thought the intense individuality occasionally released in the savage and the barbarian, disciplined in the ancient citizen, and civilised in the inhabitant of 'polished and commercial nations',[32] needed to be preserved if the moral life was to be the individual's at all, and was in some ways threatened by the progress of society it had itself created. He mentions the Funeral Oration of Pericles – to us one of the sacred texts of liberal culture – with considerable reserve; the claim that the citizen can pursue his own values and return to vindicate those of the city is put forward, he says, precisely because Pericles knows how hard it is to maintain and how easily it can be corrupted.[33] Corruption is the loss of autonomy in the pursuit of sociability, the loss of a sense of self without which there can be no sense of the public; and though it could be and was formulated under the conditions of civilised antiquity, Greek or Roman, civilised and commercial modernity has vastly multiplied the conditions under which it may occur. Ferguson reverses the Enlightenment device of the imaginary traveller by supposing a modern European finding himself at Sparta or Athens and considering them thoroughly barbarous;[34] he is mocking the modern no less than the ancient.

All this, however, is expressed in the idiom of a neo-classical moralism, in which ancient examples can be used to rebuke or edify the modern, and he is not constantly required to distance himself from antiquity. We are therefore not furnished with a historical narrative of the progress of society from ancient Rome to modern Europe, such as all the histories we have so far studied are designed to supply; nor are we offered a detailed analysis of the causes and possible course of corruption in modern commercial civilisation. The last two parts and eleven

[31] *Essay*, p. 217; see below, p. 349.
[32] See the headings of *Essay*, part fourth, sections III–IV, part fifth, section III, part sixth, section III.
[33] *Essay*, p. 207. [34] *Essay*, pp. 185–8.

chapters into which the *Essay* is divided are indeed devoted to the subject of corruption in civilised societies, but they are aimed at corruption in the moral life of the individual, and government figures chiefly as that which morality alone can sustain. The moralist in Ferguson has taken precedence over the historian, who was in a sense always ancillary to the former. This is particularly evident, and we may be tempted to find it frustrating, when the two last chapters are headed 'Of Corruption, as it tends to Political Slavery', and 'Of the Progress and Termination of Despotism'. We know that despotism is an increasingly likely outcome as societies become corrupted, and that the two tendencies reinforce one another; and we know of a distinctively modern form of corruption, which may arise as commercial societies become increasingly specialised. But Ferguson does not consider it his duty to give us his account of a distinctively modern form of despotism, arising in this sort of society and from this sort of corruption; at least, we can find it in his text only by searching for it. In the last analysis, he is writing as a moralist, rather than as a political and historical prophet.

We can find traces of two of the characteristic fears which writers of the age, especially in Enlightened England and Scotland, entertained for the future of their kind of society. One was the fear that the mismanagement or the deliberate inflation of the national debt by the statesmen who controlled it might destroy the value of all property by rendering it subject to the money market. This possibility is 'reckoned among the causes of national ruin' at the end of part v of the *Essay*,[35] though the terms in which it is spelt out are not nearly as striking as those of Hume's essay 'Of Public Credit'. Subjects thus reduced from proprietors to debtors and speculators might easily fall prey to despotism, and the despot as manipulator and monopolist of credit was a figure well within the age's powers of imagination, though Ferguson does not explicitly depict him. The second and not unrelated spectre was that of the standing army, paid by the ruler and dependent on him, which he might use to make himself despot over subjects who no longer possessed either the arms or the virtue necessary to defend themselves and their liberty. Here Ferguson is a good deal more specific, though we must turn to an earlier section:

> In Europe, where mercenary and disciplined armies are every where formed, and ready to traverse the earth, where, like a flood pent up by slender banks, they are only restrained by political forms, or a temporary balance of power; if

[35] *Essay*, p. 223.

> the sluices should break, what inundations may we not expect to behold? Effeminate kingdoms and empires are spread from the sea of Corea to the Atlantic ocean. Every state, from the defeat of its troops, may be turned into a province; every army opposed in the field today may be hired tomorrow; and every victory gained, may give the accession of a new military force to the victor.[36]

It is a passable prediction – we might say – of the Napoleonic empire. Ferguson had awakened from the dream that the Treaty of Utrecht had instituted an Anglo-French condominium in which European warfare might be contained and civilised; without turning to America, he sees the new military empires as engaged in a Eurasian conflict in which civil society may be unable to control its own armies, and a modern version of the Tartar despot is conceivable. But this passage occurs long before the concluding chapters of the *Essay*, and elsewhere in the text we meet with the Ferguson of the debate over the Scottish militia, who did not agree with Hume and Smith that professional soldiers presented no risk, but thought the risk could be, and was being, met by the continuing involvement of the gentry and the citizenry in the practice of arms.

> Even delicate living, and good accommodation, are not found to enervate the body. The armies of Europe have been obliged to make the experiment; and the children of opulent families, bred in effeminacy, or nursed with tender care, have been made to contend with the savage. By imitating his arts, they have learned, like him, to traverse the forest; and, in every season, to subsist in the desert. They have, perhaps, recovered a lesson, which it has cost civilised nations many ages to unlearn, That the fortune of a man is entire while he remains possessed of himself.[37]

It is the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, not the Heart of Darkness; colonial empire leads the civilised warrior to recover his virtue from the savage. Even in Flanders fields:

> It is happy for the nations of Europe, that the disparity between the soldier and the pacific citizen can never be so great as it became among the Greeks and the Romans. In the use of modern arms, the novice is made to learn, and to practice with ease, all that the veteran knows; and if to teach him were a matter of real difficulty, happy are they who are not deterred by such difficulties, and who can discover the arts which tend to fortify and preserve, not to enervate and ruin their country.[38]

In all this, it might be said that Ferguson was his own Pericles, rather indicating how a danger might be averted than proclaiming that it no

[36] *Essay*, p. 148 (part third, section v). [37] *Essay*, pp. 216–17.
[38] *Essay*, pp. 219–20 (part fifth, section iv).

longer existed. It continued to trouble him that:

> Distant provinces must be kept in subjection by military force; and the dictatorial powers which, in free states, are sometimes raised to quell insurrections, or to oppose other occasional evils, appear, under a certain extent of dominion, at all times equally necessary to suspend the dissolution of a body, whose parts were assembled, and must be cemented, by measures forcible, decisive, and secret. Among the circumstances, therefore, which in the event of national prosperity, and in the result of commercial arts, lead to the establishment of despotism, there is none, perhaps, that arrives at this termination, with so sure an aim, as the perpetual enlargement of territory. In every state, the freedom of its members depends on the balance and adjustment of its interior parts; and the existence of any such freedom among mankind, depends upon the balance of nations. In the progress of conquest those who are subdued are said to have lost their liberties; but from the history of mankind, to conquer, or to be conquered, has appeared, in effect, the same.[39]

It may be doubted, nonetheless, whether Ferguson saw the Europe of 1767 as threatened with universal empire, or either the British or the French monarchy as threatened with militarisation arising from unlimited aggrandisement. He was prophesying only in the sense that he was moralising, exploring the dangers inherent in a certain type of society rather than denouncing any specific or immediate peril; and the closing chapters of the *Essay* are moral, in the sense that they warn the reader against the faults of character conducive to despotism, rather than alerting him to the threat of despotism in any immediate form. For all that, the image of despotism remains strong to the end, and the last pages present it in terms which seemed, to at least one contemporary, to occupy a moment in the history of civil society.

> When by the conquest and annexation of every rich and cultivated province

– this strongly suggests Rome –

> the measure of empire is full, two parties are sufficient to comprehend mankind; that of the pacific and the wealthy, who dwell within the pale of empire; and that of the poor, the rapacious and the fierce, who are inured to depredation and war.

The provincials and the barbarians?

> The last bear to the first nearly the same relation which the wolf and the lion bear to the fold; and they are naturally engaged in a state of hostility.
>
> Were despotic empire, mean-time, to continue for ever unmolested from abroad, while it retains that corruption on which it was founded, it appears to

[39] *Essay*, p. 257 (part sixth, section v).

> have in itself no principle of new life, and presents no hope of restoration to freedom and political vigour. That which the despotical *master has sown, cannot quicken unless it die*; it must languish and expire by the effect of its own abuse, before the human spirit can spring up anew or bear those fruits which constitute the honour and the felicity of human nature.[40]

Ferguson goes on to depict the people as deprived of arms, property, the habit of association and movable wealth; as altogether enslaved.

> National poverty, however, and the suppression of commerce, are the means by which despotism comes to accomplish its own destruction. Where there are no longer any profits to corrupt, or fears to deter, the charm of dominion is broken, and the naked slave, as awake from a dream, is astonished to find he is free. When the fence is destroyed, the wilds are open, and the herd breaks loose. The pasture of the cultivated field is no longer preferred to that of the desert. The sufferer willingly flies where the extortions of government cannot overtake him; where even the timid and the servile may recollect they are men; where the tyrant may threaten, but where he is known to be no more than a fellow-creature; where he can take nothing but life, and even this at the hazard of his own.
>
> Agreeably to this description, the vexations of tyranny have overcome, in many parts of the East, the desire of settlement. The inhabitants of a village quit their habitations, and infest the public ways; those of the valleys fly to the mountains, and, equipt for flight, or possessed of a strong hold, subsist by depredation, and by the war they make on their former masters.
>
> These disorders conspire with the impositions of government to render the remaining settlements still less secure: but while devastation and ruin appear on every side, mankind are forced anew upon those confederacies, acquire again that personal confidence and vigour, that social attachment, that use of arms, which, in former times, rendered a small tribe the seed of a great nation; and which may again enable the emancipated slave to begin the career of civil and commercial arts. When human nature appears in the utmost state of corruption, it has actually begun to reform.[41]

In spite of the opening language – the barbarians as external proletariat, an increasingly enserfed populace as internal – this is not the history of Rome. It was not supposed that the provincials had lost everything, only the will to defend it; and it had not been a matter of slaves fleeing to the desert to become shepherds, but of pastoral barbarians invading through grasslands and forests to add themselves to those enserfing the peasants. Ferguson was using the image of a despotism juxtaposed with that of a desert, to which the slaves fled to become

[40] *Essay*, p. 262 (part sixth, section vi).

[41] *Essay*, pp. 262–4. Was Burke thinking of this passage when he imagined a 'race of English Tartars' in the *Speech on Conciliation with the Colonies*?

shepherds if not hunters and begin the history of civil society again, as a Montesquieuan and Scottish retelling of the Lockean or Hobbesian scenario. This, in terms of theoretical history, was what happened when the people dissolved their government and reverted to the state of nature; but for Ferguson the state of nature was everywhere, and the thought-experiment of imagining humans deprived of everything except themselves led back to the beginning of 'the career of civil and commercial arts'. Strictly interpreted, this should have led to the state of savagery, the point at which 'personal confidence and vigour' were first released by the experience of society; but the escaped slaves, who have lost sociability to despotism and are seeking to renew it, are depicted as haiduks, klephts and maroons, an external proletariat of primitive rebels, rather bandits than either hunters or herdsmen, and the carcass of empire is still there for them to prey upon. Human history is beginning again from the Cave of Adullam or the wilderness beyond Sinai.

It is highly possible that Ferguson was writing less a piece of theoretical history than one of powerful imagery in which history provided a figure reminding the reader that corruption and recovery occurred in his own moral life; that his virtue was his own so long as he remained 'possessed of himself'. Civil history was ancillary to moral philosophy, not acting as an autonomous science. But in using 'the East' as illustrative material, he had given 'the desert' an Oriental character, and as an image of catastrophe and rebirth anticipating Wordsworth's dream in the *Prelude* of the Arab, the shell, and the pursuing deluge. It was possible, therefore, to read his very powerful poetic employment of Scottish theoretical history as an exercise in imagining a history rather Asian than European. The *Essay on the History of Civil Society* was reviewed, shortly after its first appearance, in the *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*, the short-lived periodical which Gibbon and Georges Deyverdun published in London during 1768–9.[42] The identity of the reviewer is not known for certain, and a reference to Gibbon's *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature*[43] need mean no more than that Gibbon was editor of the journal. But the review, which must have passed under Gibbon's eye, tells us at least how Ferguson's *Essay* could be read by an attentive critic. The reviewer admires Ferguson's historical imagination, *quoiqu'Ecossois*,[44] and makes an interesting comment on Voltaire's four moments of efflorescence when observing:

[42] *Mém. litt.*,1768, pp. 45–74. A second volume appeared a year later. [43] *Mém. litt.*, p. 62n.
[44] 'Although he is a Scot'; *Mém. litt.*, p. 56.

Il paroit plutôt que les Lettres ont succedé aux orages. La discorde civil reveille, excite, et fortifie le genie, et le calme qui succède à la discorde ne laisse au genie que la carrière des lettres, qu'il embrasse avec ardeur. Le feu, qui eût devoré un empire, l'eclaire. C'est l'histoire des IV siècles, mais surtout de ceux d'Auguste et de Louis XIV.[45]

[It rather appears that letters bloom after storms. Civil discord awakes, excites and fortifies genius, and the calm that follows leaves it no recourse but to the career of letters, which it embraces with ardour. The fire which would have devoured an empire now illuminates it. Such is the history of the four ages, above all those of Augustus and Louis XIV.][46]

It is an elaboration on a passage by Ferguson which does not include the allusion to Voltaire. Enlightenment comes after civil strife, as when Virgil wrote in Augustus's service, but there is a Tacitean flavour, which Voltaire might not have liked, to the observation that genius turns to letters when denied political action. Is the relation between despotism and the arts beginning its development? Of the passage we have been considering the review remarks:

Les esclaves quittent enfin leurs champs depouillés, se refugient dans les deserts, y fondent des Republiques, et recommencent de nouveau la carrière de la liberté, des vertus et des arts. C'est par cette idée consolante que Mr Ferguson termine son ouvrage. Seroit elle aussi juste qu'elle est consolante? L'histoire ne m'offre point l'exemple de ce cercle politique. L'Orient, patrie du Despotisme, n'a connu que ce gouvernement affreux, la cour de Nadir Shah me retrace celle de Ninus, et si j'apperçois dans ce vaste intervalle quelques instans de force et de vertu, je n'en découvre aucun de la liberté. L'Europe, libre et guerriere, succomba, une fois, sous le joug de l'Empire Romain; vers le temps de Constantin et de Theodose, on avoit oublié jusqu'au nom de la liberté. Il fallut que le Nord s'ebranlât pour briser les fers du Midi. Parmi les monarchies que les Barbares fonderent dans nos climats, il semble qu'il y en a plus d'une que s'avance à grands pas vers le Despotisme. Quel sera enfin leur sort? Nous sommes Journalistes, et non point Prophètes.[47]

[The slaves at last abandon their plundered fields, take refuge in the deserts, found republics there, and begin anew the career of liberty, the virtues and the arts. It is upon this consoling reflection that Mr Ferguson concludes his work. Is it as true as it is comforting? History reveals to me no instance of this political cycle.The East, the homeland of despotism, has known only this terrible form of government; the court of Nadir Shah reminds me of that of Ninus, and if in

[45] *Mém. litt.*, p. 61.
[46] Trans. JGAP. The 'four ages' cannot be the four stages, and must be the four moments of monarchically sponsored arts set out by Voltaire at the beginning of the *Siècle de Louis XIV* (above, pp. 84–5). [47] *Mém. litt.*, pp. 72–3.

all the vast interval between them I discern a few examples of energy and virtue, I perceive none of liberty. Free and warlike Europe once sank under the yoke of the Roman empire, and by the times of Constantine and Theodosius, even the name of liberty had been forgotten. It was necessary that the North should burst in to break the chains of the South. Among the monarchies which the Barbarians founded in our climates, it seems there are more than one which advance with long strides towards despotism. What will be their fate? We are journalists, not prophets.][48]

The reviewer clearly believes that Ferguson has been purporting to describe a situation in real history, but can think of none corresponding to the description. The desert suggests Mesopotamian or Arabian history, and he intimates that desert horsemen cannot of themselves found free societies, but are condemned to repeat the rise and fall of palace despotisms. The conquering tribe will furnish the prince with his guards. One regrets that Enlightened historians had no access to the work of Ibn Khaldun, in whose *asabiyah* they would have recognised *virtù* in a highly Fergusonian form, and in whose cycles they would have found confirmation of their perception of Arab and nomad history. Only a complex interweaving of pastoral and agrarian history could account for the growth of liberty in Europe, and the end of Roman empire was not achieved by slaves taking refuge in the desert, but by independently existing pastoral barbarians taking possession of territories where agriculture had achieved urbanisation, and not even the latter had altogether disappeared. When Gibbon in due course imagined the recreation of civil society after catastrophe, he did not start from barbarians realising their freedom anew, but from peasants who had not quite forgotten improvements.[49] It is perhaps Smith's image rather than Ferguson's; but Ferguson was so clear that the nomad alone must fall under despotism, and that the history of civil society required the shepherd to move through the phase of tillage, that one sees he was in agreement with all these strictures and that his image of renewal belongs to moral rather than to civil history. Though it cannot be quite as romantic as it seems, it is nevertheless an enigmatic piece of writing; and not the least puzzling thing about it is the great omission, which, as the reviewer saw, characterises the *Essay* as a whole.

On voit avec surprise que la Religion, qui a toujours tenu une si grande place dans la Société civile, n'en tient aucune dans son livre. Il semble même qu'il

[48] Trans. JGAP. It would be interesting to know what modern monarchies the reviewer had in mind.

[49] At the conclusion of the 'General Reflections on the Fall of the Empire in the West'.

evite avec soin des matières aussi delicates. En louant sa prudence, il nous convient de l'imiter.[50]

[It is surprising that religion, which has always held so great a place in civil society, holds none in his book. It even appears that he has been at pains to avoid a matter of such delicacy. In applauding his prudence, it behoves us to imitate it.][51]

The intimation of clerical repression will not quite do. Gibbon in 1776 was to find that his history of the primitive church landed him in hotter water than he had anticipated, but there were many histories of both the church in European history and of religion in that of civil society; and it was a fair question why the Scottish professors were not integrating it into their stadial schemes. That there had been superstition in savage cultures, emergent priesthoods among barbarians, civil religion in the pagan cities, was all well enough known; yet Smith, Millar and Ferguson had chosen not to organise their knowledge on this point. And it was already understood that under the late empire there had occurred a flight of citizens to the desert with which Ferguson had not dealt; a flight to the Thebaid rather than to the sand dunes or the steppe, which had issued in the creation of monasteries rather than republics – for Voltaire, of a republic of an altogether new kind. If Ferguson had been writing a history of Europe, he could have been required to deal with the phenomenon; and if he was writing a conjectural history, or an essay on the history of civil society, it was fair to ask what sort of history it was which omitted the history of the church, the greatest counter-organisation to that of civil society which had ever been known.

We have reached a point of considerable importance to the future structure of the *Decline and Fall*. That 'interesting subject, the progress of society in Europe', is founded in barbarism, but never in savagery. As far back as it is necessary to go in order to discover the prehistory of Greek or of Roman civilisation, we encounter shepherd peoples moving westward, capable of grouping themselves in primitive republics, but never peoples in the gathering and hunting states of society to which the name of 'savages' can philosophically be given. This is not to say that they were never there; if Smith or Ferguson had encountered them in the prehistorical past of Europe, neither would have been disturbed or found his system disrupted; but it is to say that neither found it necessary to look for or even to mention them. Barbarians in the proper sense, capable of mixing pasturage with tillage, furnished both that primeval

[50] *Mém. litt.*, p. 74. [51] Trans. JGAP.

'Europe' which Robertson saw as recovering from its subjugation by Roman conquest and that 'modern race' of Gothic, German and Saxon pastoralists whom Ferguson saw as re-creating the stages of growth among the ruins of Roman urbanity. There had been two foundations of Europe by barbarism, and it was to the second that historians must look to find the origins of modern agrarian and urban freedom. The barbarian might be recognised both by his capacity for liberty and by his capacity to generate the systems of law which he did not yet understand. Gibbon, studying the second foundation, 'the triumph of barbarism and religion', was to find no true savages in his narrative. Hunting peoples, as Montesquieu had observed, never assembled in such numbers as to find invasion and conquest within their powers, and there are none to be met with in the narrative of the *Decline and Fall*. When Gibbon uses the epithet 'savage', as he does frequently, it is with the apparent intention of eliding the difference between hunting and herding society and moving in a direction contrary to the Scottish insistence that history begins at the shepherd stage; yet this involves him in using 'savage' to convey all the attributes of 'barbarian'. Gibbon both was and was not Smith's disciple; but he was at one with him on the history of Europe.

Savages proper thus became exotic, no part of the European past. We have seen how Ferguson's scheme relegated them to moving east from northern Asia, to populate the American continents, while their shepherd neighbours, where the forest met the steppe, moved west to fertilise the history of Europe. If Ferguson knew de Guignes's *Histoire des Huns*, he knew that nomads had also interacted with the history of China; but his use of central Asia as 'the nursery of nations' produced a narrative so far centred in *le nord* as to marginalise the great empires outside it, in every region but Europe, whether ancient and vanished Egypt and Mesopotamia or ancient and persisting India and China. Here, rather (in Ferguson's case) than in any racial feeling, may lie the origins of that steady exclusion of Egyptians and Phoenicians from the origins of Greek civilisation which has been studied and magnified in a recent work.[52] The Scottish perception of proto-Hellenic history was decidedly Dorian, and laid all its emphases on the return of the Heraclides. What Ferguson might have to say about Iranian or Arabic history is not so clear; the exclusion of the eastern empires from the epic of European barbarism left them (and him) exposed to the paradigm of oriental despotism. The foundations of a Eurasian scheme of world history had

[52] Bernal, 1987.

been laid, and Ferguson's case owes a great deal to the expansion of the Russian state, half despotic and half Enlightened, into the macrocontinental space of *le nord*. We are next to discover, however, that these foundations were a good deal older than Ferguson, and could be established within a conceptual scheme of history markedly less Enlightened than his.

Elsewhere in the issue of the *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne* which contains the review of Ferguson's *Essay*, we find references of considerable acerbity to a work entitled *Remains of Japhet: Being Historical Enquiries into the Affinity and Origins of the European Languages*, just published (1767) by James Parsons.[53] This work incurred the reviewer's censure by citing a Tibetan trigram – 'une Medaille de la Province de Tangut'[54] – as evidence of a primeval recognition of the doctrine of the Trinity. Parsons was one of those 'antiquarians of profound learning and easy faith' whom Gibbon later derided for remaining within the Noachic genealogies.[55] The title of his book encapsulates his intention of showing that:

> While the people, who were descended from *Japhet* and *Shem*, were enjoying the blessings conferred upon them by their father, in spreading themselves over those countries already mentioned,

that is, Scythia and Europe, as far as Britain and Ireland,

> and persevering in the patriarchal worship of the TRUE GOD; the children of *Ham*, the *Canaanites*, were reviving the most rank idolatry, which had made so much progress in the world, from *Cain* down to the deluge; and which consisted chiefly in deifying their ancestors, and offering them divine worship. And this came to be so much increased by the time that *Egypt* and *Phoenicia* were well established into kingdoms and governments, that wherever the people of those two parts of the world had any influence their gods became numerous, and their temples many and magnificent. They had lost all that heavenly influence, which the great BEING is pleased to confer on those who are his true worshippers; and were abandoned to their own wicked imaginations, making gods for themselves, and then foolishly adoring them. They envied the sons of *Japhet* and *Shem*, and opposed their religion to that of these patriarchs, and while the former were migrating to greater and greater distances northward and westward, in the enjoyment of the pure worship of GOD, the *Phoenicians* and *Egyptians* were invading the *Pelasgi*, from whom their brethren went, and, by degrees, introduced their superstitions, either by force or stratagem, to the intire subversion of the patriarchal system in *Greece*; and therefore they gradual-

[53] *DNB*, 'Parsons, James (1705–1770)'. He was an MD of Rheims and a foreign secretary of the Royal Society. [54] *Mém. litt.*, p. 216.
[55] *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. 9; Womersley, I, p. 234; Bury, I, p. 234.

ly came to idolize their fathers, even up to *Japhet*, and built temples to them also. But the true worship was brought to *Britain* and *Ireland* . . . and remained pure for many ages, in those places so remote from the scenes of action, in those kingdoms that were first established. We see idolatry began very early in *Greece*, and that after its establishment there from *Egypt* and *Phoenicia*, it overtook, at last, the true religion in every corner of the earth, and subverted it; except in *Shem*'s line, in which it was most wonderfully preserved, and confirmed, in *Abraham*. Hence it will be easy to conclude, that *Britain* and *Ireland* were inhabited before it was corrupted in the isles of *Elisha*; and it amounts to a proof, that they were among the first that were driven out of their own country, who arrived in our island long before the irruption made upon them by *Deucalion*, because they long continued to worship the TRUE GOD, as it is recorded in the annals of *Ireland*, in these kingdoms, before idolatry overtook them from the continent.[56]

Here we have a history of religion, such as Scottish Enlightenment as we know it rarely undertook; but it is based on that biblically derived thesis of primeval monotheism which Hume was anxious to dispel in the *Natural History of Religion*. In a biblically governed culture, we should further observe, it was very easy to be anti-Judaic, but virtually impossible to be anti-Semitic, since the genealogy of Jesus Christ after the flesh was traced back to Shem. It was possible to be anti-Hamitic, since Noah's curse on Ham and Canaan could be said to have descended to their progeny, and this was the only racial condemnation to be derived from Scripture. Here the accursed people are the Phoenicians and Egyptians; Parsons clearly does not think of the former as using a 'Semitic' language, and he does not name any descendants of Shem other than the Jews. Nor is this a racism based on colour; the curse of Ham could indeed be extended to justify the enslavement of Africans, but there is no sign here that Egyptians are regarded as black. The distinguishing characteristic of the descendants of Ham is not pigmentation but idolatry. It is Egyptians and Phoenicians, whose settlement in Greece is not denied, who establish there the polytheism of pagan antiquity; and if Parsons had desired – there is no sign that he did – to vindicate the philosophy of Socrates and Plato as a vision of the true religion, he might have had to affirm some Japhetic or Semitic presence in very ancient Hellas, as the Eurasian and pastoral thesis of Smith and Ferguson offered one means of doing. This may well have been a motive for the subsequent exclusion of Egyptians and Phoenicians from Greek archaeology in favour of 'Indo-Europeans', a term not yet invented. And the corrupt idolatry that pursues the true religion even to Japhetic

[56] Parsons, 1767, pp. 89–90. The adjective 'patriarchal' refers to no social or domestic system, but to the authority of the patriarchs of Genesis and the Noachic genealogies.

and monotheist Britain and Ireland, is the Hamitic polytheism of Greece and Rome, adopted into the false Christianity of the papal church, disguised – Parsons would have told us – as the veneration of saints and relics.

The distinguishing feature of a biblical race consisted not in the physical characteristics it might possess, but in the truth or falsity of the religion it maintained. This, however, did not mean that it might not display a peculiar set of social or cultural characteristics, acquired in the course of its post-diluvial or post-Babelic wanderings. In the case before us, the race of Japhet is divided into the descendants of Gomer and Magog, sons of the patriarch; and it is the latter, in particular the Scythians, who adopt a pastoral way of life, in which they develop a cultural flexibility anticipating the dynamism of Smith's shepherds.

Some of them, in the course of their migrations, lived in *clans*, without building houses, towns or cities; removing from place to place with their families and cattle; whilst others formed themselves into kingdoms, having cities, towns, agriculture and commerce with other nations; so that the nearer they were to those parts where commerce was first established, the more they were civilized, and approached the nearer to the civil policy of their neighbouring kingdoms; and it will appear in the sequel, that many nations of the early *Scythians* were become examples to other people, for the purity of their laws, philosophy, music and poetry, as well as a true heroic spirit; and so were their relations, the *Gomerians*, in all their governments. But when their colonies were driven into more remote parts, they forgot, in process of time, everything that did not immediately regard their necessities, and were therefore reduced to such a state as we see the *North Americans* are now in, living in tribes, or nations, by hunting and cattle, without tillage, or any other improvement, or constant settlement, and making incursions upon one another like them; and this we see is the case at present, even under the dominion of the *Russians* and *Tartars*, in the remotest parts of those empires, which are so extensive, notwithstanding [that] there are emperors, kings and kans [*sic*] at their head in several of these countries.

They were, however, ingenious enough, and very industrious; for where they were situated near any trading places, they had commerce with their neighbours, and where they had not in more remote parts, yet they cultivated such trades among themselves, as sufficiently furnished them with necessaries, for convenience and war.

They were capable of making their carriages, or waggons, for the use of their families; they had the use of iron, in making their arrows and other necessaries in that metal: and they are said too have been expert in dressing, not only the skins of the animals they fed upon, but also even those of their enemies slain in war, wherewith the victors adorned themselves and their houses.[57]

[57] Parsons, 1767, pp. 62–3.

(A clear proof of the Scythian origin of North American scalp-takers.) 'Ce livre deplaira aux gens à recherches', the *Mémoires littéraires* remarked with severity, 'parceque l'erudition en est fausse, ou triviale',[58] and indeed it is not a systematic sociology of progress. Parsons's information, however, is no worse than Ferguson's, and he is showing us that schemes of social development fully as complex as those of the Glasgow and Edinburgh jurists could be integrated with the biblical mythology, as developed by Gibbon's credulous and pedantic antiquarians. All Enlightenment did was to disengage the information from the mythology, and fit it into an ordered account of the unfolding of the human mind; but even when the stages of the Scottish narrative were not rigorously tied each to its corresponding faculty, there was something sealed and self-enclosed about each of them, which made it hard to see them as existing together in a mixed condition. Parsons's Scythians can climb up the ladder of technological progress and then slip down it again, so that it is the less surprising to see them operating on several levels simultaneously. He is even at ease with the spectacle of metallurgy and the wheel existing in nomad cultures, a puzzle to more systematic theorists who could not see how specialised skills could have developed to that point in such a state of society. His Scythians can remember, forget and invent; they are not tied to any particular combination of the mind's powers.

Parsons can therefore move his mixed cultures through Eurasian space until some of them reach the Atlantic archipelago. We discover at this point that the central problem of British prehistory was the presence, in that island as in Ireland, of both cattle-herding and agricultural economies, and that the Noachic scheme could be used to explain it. We hear that:

> the *Magogians*, or *Scythians*, had driven before them, through all the *North-western* parts, some weaker colonies of themselves into *Ireland* and *Scotland*, as well as to other *Northern* islands, which was their *ne plus ultra*, and which were the *Aborigines* of these islands; and that the *Gomerians*, afterwards called *Celts* and *Gallatae*, by the Greeks, and *Galli* or *Gauls*, by the Latins, spread themselves all over the *South-western* parts of *Europe*, giving the first rise to *Greeks*, *Latins*, *Franks*, *Biscayans*, and arriving in the *Southern* parts of *Britain*, by sea from the isles of *Elisha*, about the same time (or soon after the *British* islands were inhabited by their relations, the *Magogians* or *Scythians*), and long before their brethren, the *Gauls* or *Celts*, came into any part of *France* or *Spain*.[59]

[58] *Mém. litt.*, p. 216. 'This book will not satisfy the curious, since its erudition is false or trivial.'
[59] Parsons, 1767, pp. 48–9.

> Now it seems very probable, that these first *Gomerians* who arrived here, were versed in the business of mining, which the *Magogians*, they found inhabiting some parts of this island before them, knew nothing of; they were civilized by their intercourse with trading rich nations, and versed in the more polite customs of a great variety of people, in that central trading spot of the world; the *Magogians*, who went by land, had no such advantage in their flights from their enemies; and, no doubt, lived all along in the simple original manner, by hunting and cattle, as we find people in the more remote *Northern* nations at this day, and indeed in every other unfrequented part of the world, where commerce was never introduced, nor incursions of strangers yet begun; whereas those *Magogians*, who arrived in *Ireland* by sea, immediately from the *Mediterranean*, were versed in arms, had sublime notions of government, and preserved their records by their bards and historians, as the *Gomerians* did.[60]

They were mariners who remembered the Ark, and the Atlantic had no terrors for them. Parsons is as adverse as ever to polarising cultures into simple stages, or identifying particular peoples with particular stages of development. He has a narrative to explain the simultaneous settlement of the archipelago by a diversity of cultures, but he could not have constructed it without presupposing the combination of hunting and herding as the earliest human economy. With Ferguson and Smith we have been looking at the consequences of separating the two; and the native Americans had no cattle.

[60] Parsons, 1767, pp. 51–2.

CHAPTER 24

Scottish narrative: theoretical and civil history

Layman though he was, Dr Parsons's *Remains of Japhet* carries us back into the world of English clerical historiography, in which the narrative of the progress of society had not been rewritten in terms so unbiblical as to leave no room for the history of religion. Gibbon's *Mémoires littéraires* found this book so unphilosophical as to be unscholarly, but the preceding chapter has examined it in some detail in order to show that the biblical narrative was compatible with quite complex schemes of the acquisition of civility – as across the Channel was the case with both Goguet and de Guignes, neither of whom departed from the older Christian chronology, or was challenged by Gibbon for not doing so. The stages of society could be narrated with the intention of bypassing the sacred, and sometimes this was the reason for narrating them; but the orthodox believer need have no objection to including them in his narrative. When sceptical philosophers abandoned the Mosaic and Noachic chronologies, and the devices – which to us seem so absurd – for reconciling the Hellenic and other chronologies with them, there was not an immediate leap into a new scientific prehistory, for in an age still bound to the ancient texts there was no readily available alternative. Enlightened thought about the early history of mankind went on in a curious interlude between the decline of chronology and the birth of palaeontology and archaeology as the nineteenth century constructed them; it was the spade, not the sceptic, that transformed prehistory. A door to the future was opened, in Gibbon's mind, by Buffon's decision to treat the human as an animal species like any other.

Scottish stadial history therefore continued to operate in a universe defined by natural jurisprudence, and to occupy a middle ground between historiography and philosophy. It could (and did) retain the character of a natural history, an exposition of the powers of the mind at work in a diversity of social and moral situations; or it could take on the character of a historical anthropology, an archaeology of the states of

society the mind had generated, whose laws and manners might be discovered preserved in history or persisting in the present – with the Americas, of course, in the role of a Lost World in which archaic man was still making his last stand (a perception whose appeal is not yet exhausted). In Europe, however, the 'strong ray' of Scottish 'philosophic light' revealed a 'progress of society' set going by the relative dynamism of shepherd and 'barbarian' society, and the role of the barbarian himself began to change; he ceased being an 'other' and became an origin of the self. If European societies had always been in some measure dynamic, they had from their beginnings both contained and produced narratives of their progress, their failures, or even their illusions; and here arose the question of the relations between the narrative of the progress of society and the narratives that progress had produced and was still producing.

The stadial sequence figured in a number of roles, intermediate between the extremes of metanarrative and macronarrative. It might be nothing more than a natural or conjectural history, tabulating ways in which the mind might act on nature to socialise itself and produce society; in this capacity it was an instrument of moral philosophy and scarcely of history at all, and the Scottish professors never abandoned philosophy or proclaimed themselves historians. Without abandoning this role, however, it might become a metanarrative in the sense of a sequential statement of the conditions necessary before the various modes of human social action – including narrative itself – could become possible. As it developed this role, it increasingly figured as a heuristic and explanatory narrative of the sequence in which varying states of society might be discovered in the past or the present, whether succeeding one another or persisting and interacting side by side. This was to move from metanarrative towards macronarrative, and approach – without necessarily realising in full – the status of a comprehensive evolutionary scheme in which every human capacity and mode of action appeared at its proper moment in the universal sequence. We should be hard put to it, however, to discover any Scottish philosopher of history who aimed as high as this, and possibly the difficulty of deciding how far to proceed in this direction accounts for the incompleteness in which Smith left his grand project of historical jurisprudence at the time of his death. For as the stadial sequence took on this macronarrative character it encountered the narratives of civil history, already formed and in place, ranging from the classical narratives of rhetoric and *belles-lettres* through the contending narratives advanced in

the course of jurisdictional dispute; and the sharpness of Smith's distinction between these two forms is enough to show that he entertained no project of doing away with either of them. The explanatory capacity of historical jurisprudence and its moral philosophy – including its capacity to identify the modes of human action, thought and behaviour possible at the various stages of society – therefore underlay, illuminated, mobilised and enlarged, but did not subsume or abolish, the existing capacities of historical narrative to relate and explain itself, and philosophical history retained its Momiglianan place as one among several modes making up the complex of historiography. The triumvirate of those who had thrown philosophic light on the progress of society overlapped with but did not absorb the triumvirate of historians of whom Gibbon himself was the only possible third; whether a Lepidus or an Augustus is another matter.

This volume has so far been a history of narratives, each pursued in its individual complexity and allowed to stand by itself and in its own right; but pursued at the same time with a view to establishing the historiographical universe in which Gibbon began shaping the *Decline and Fall*, and with an eye to the possible relation between each narrative and that which he constructed. It has been a premise that Gibbon was a historian rather than a *philosophe* or a philosopher, and a philosophic historian in so far as this entered into shaping the kind of historian he was. The great narrators – in Britain Hume and Robertson – have received more space than the great philosophers of history, for the reason that as historians of state they were obliged to bring together more narratives, and more modes of narration, and that Gibbon himself incurred increasing obligations of this kind as his history took the shape he progressively gave it. He was not a philosopher and did not write history as a philosophic enterprise; he drew on philosophic history, French or Scottish, as it increased the complexity of his understanding of the historic story. Scottish stadial history, it has been suggested, was history of society rather than history of state, and gave the former a strongly scientific character; but the history of state was already, and independently, a history of manners, opinions, and ultimately of society. Smith, and probably Ferguson, vastly enriched Gibbon's historical understanding but did not transform it; they took their stand beside others, some Scottish and some French, as the pillars on which it rested. If we press the analysis of their role a step further, we may find that their function was to enrich his understanding of barbarism, restating it in terms of the role of shepherd societies in the making of European history. We know,

however, that the *Decline and Fall* is a history of barbarism and religion; and concerning the latter there was more to be learned from Hume, who had sought to explain religion precisely because he detested it, than from Robertson, who had been cautious about its history, or from Smith and Ferguson, who had found little to say about it. The history of government, and of manners, had to be a history both ecclesiastical and civil; and it is a fact that the *Decline and Fall* goes deeper into the history of the ecclesiastical organisation of religion, and presents that history on a more imperial scale, than any of the great narratives studied in this volume. To enquire how Gibbon came to do this, and how it affected his handling of the components of the Momiglianan triad, we must next enquire how his project differed from, while continuing to rest upon, the 'Enlightened narrative' as it has appeared so far in this study.

PART IV

Intending the Decline and Fall

CHAPTER 25

The Enlightened narrative and the project of 1776

This book has so far consisted of a series of excursions through the narratives of major Enlightened historians who were in various ways of importance to Gibbon, especially in his composition of the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*. It may be well to repeat here that the objective in writing it has been other than that of supplying a biography of Edward Gibbon or an intellectual history of the *Decline and Fall*; rather that of isolating a series of contexts, existing and worth scrutiny in their own right, in which the author's conduct and the content of his text may be studied. There are many such contexts, and that studied here is defined by the texts which have furnished it. To isolate it is to privilege it, at the expense of other contexts not here treated; it has, for example, been a context constructed by major narrative histories, rather than by major works of erudition, such as Tillemont's or Muratori's, and the genesis of the *Decline and Fall* would appear in a different light if studied in such context. Gibbon's, however, is a narrative history and the context of narrative has much to tell us about it. The narratives studied in preceding chapters have been treated as furnishing a context independent of the *Decline and Fall*, into which the latter may be inserted with the effect of learning something about it; it is a consequence that they have been treated as independently existing, and not with an eye solely to their possible connections with Gibbon's text. Here is the mental world of historians who were his equals, whom he recognised as such, and with whom he aspired to equality. In this concluding section, we are to begin the process of estimating his work both by his affinities with these historians, and by his departures from patterns of thinking otherwise common to them.

An organising theme of the present volume has been the establishment of 'the Enlightened narrative', common from Giannone to Robertson as a history of 'Europe' – a term it did something to define – 'modern' in the double sense that it was post-ancient and surpassed the

'medieval'. With its point of departure at the end of the western empire, or at the renewal of empire by Charlemagne, this narrative proceeded to cover what we have termed 'the Christian millennium', defined as the centuries of 'barbarism and religion', feudal tenures and ecclesiastical supremacy, inaugurated by Constantine, confirmed in the Latin provinces by the popes, and enduring until the time of Charles V (with Robertson) or Louis XIV (with Voltaire). The latter discrepancy added to 'the Christian millennium' proper a further period corresponding to our 'early modern' and consisting in essence of the 'Wars of Religion', in which the ecclesiastical challenge to civil society took the form of anarchy as well as monarchy. It was in dealing with this later period that Enlightenment developed as a critique of Calvinist Protestantism (and enthusiasm) as well as of Nicene Catholicism (and superstition). There also appeared at this stage an implicit debate over the relative importance of the forces making for modernity about 1500 – navigation, printing, gunpowder and the revival of letters – and those operating about 1700: standing army and public credit, commerce and the new philosophy. It was the latter set of forces that constituted 'Enlightenment', and therefore the telos of the 'Enlightened narrative', though whether that narrative reached them as its endpoint was another matter.

The narrative culminated in civil government, in the establishment of a system of states capable of controlling religion and conducting their own affairs; and in civil society, meaning the formation of a culture of enlightened manners based upon commerce, in which Europeans could live without regard to theological dispute and ecclesiastical division, if not to religion itself. There was consequently a historiography of state, in which the older and newer forms of historical narrative interacted most vitally; a historiography of manners and sociability, merging into Scottish jurisprudential and conjectural history at one of its extremes; and, least visible of the three but never entirely eliminable, a historiography of religion and philosophy, designed to promote the reconciliation of religion with sociability. In the interactions between these three, we may also trace the interactions between narrative, erudition and philosophical history. All patterns led towards a condition of Enlightened modernity and constituted 'the Enlightened narrative' as a modern history.

Such is the Enlightened narrative as we have come to know it from the histories studied in this volume. We have now to consider the place of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in the context which they

provide; and two broadly contrasting conclusions present themselves. The first is that Gibbon accepts this account of the history of Europe, with little or no significant dissent or departure from the story it has to tell. He repeatedly makes it clear that he is living and writing in, for and on behalf of a civilisation of commerce rather than slavery or feudalism, of polite manners rather than warrior virtue or religious faith, of trade and treaties between a system of states rather than a universal empire or an anarchy of contending theocracies; and he upholds this civilisation as against its predecessors, with few doubts expressed as to its future. The Enlightened narrative is the metanarrative of the *Decline and Fall*, the history in which it is written and which explains how it has become possible to write it. To David Hume, who had doubts about the future of Enlightenment, it was because of these doubts that it was remarkable that the *Decline and Fall* should have been completed.

But if it is the metanarrative it is not the narrative of the *Decline and Fall*; Gibbon did not reiterate the Enlightened narrative as Voltaire, Hume or Robertson had written it. Where they were all historians of modernity, of the 'Christian millennium' and the way out of it, his *Decline and Fall* was the history of late antiquity and the way into it – into a 'modern' history defined as that of ecclesiastical power rather than civil. The lack of a history 'modern' in the sense that it traces the preconditions of Enlightenment is the first of Gibbon's departures from the Enlightened narrative considered as a norm – as he clearly knew it to be; but it is not the last. A second occurs when we perceive that the *Decline and Fall*'s later volumes offer no history of the Christian millennium, in the sense of the ascendancy of feudal and clerical power in the Latin west; that history is known and even utilised, but it is not the central narrative. Instead, the later volumes pursue the history of eastern, Greek-speaking empire to the Turkish conquest completed in 1453; a history not narrated by any other philosophic or Enlightened historian of Gibbon's day and age.

These are major departures from what we are entitled to consider a pattern. They are to be understood as the product of a series of decisions that Gibbon took, or found that he had taken, between 1765, when he returned to England from Lausanne, Paris and Rome, and 1776, when he published the first volume of the *Decline and Fall*, with a prospectus of the whole work as he then planned it. The *Memoirs* advise us to divide this period about 1772, when following his father's death Gibbon settled in London and began serious work on his history. Though we lack journals, and he seems to have kept none, for the years 1765 to 1776,

there are various works surviving from this period, of which some but not others can be reliably dated and give evidence of his interests and researches. In order to state the problem which the evidence may or may not illuminate, it is appropriate to move to 1776 and examine the prospectus he then announced, with a view to seeing what decisions he had by then taken and asking what they were and why he may have taken them.

Gibbon prefaced his first volume in the following terms:

> The memorable series of revolutions, which, in the course of about thirteen centuries, gradually undermined, and at length destroyed, the solid fabric of Roman greatness, may, with some propriety, be divided into the three following periods.
>
> I. The first of these periods may be traced from the age of Trajan and the Antonines, when the Roman monarchy, having attained its full strength and maturity, began to verge towards its decline; and will extend to the subversion of the Western Empire, by the barbarians of Germany and Scythia, the rude ancestors of the most polished nations of modern Europe. This extraordinary revolution, which subjected Rome to the power of a Gothic conqueror was completed about the beginning of the sixth century.
>
> II. The second period of the Decline and Fall of Rome, may be supposed to commence with the reign of Justinian, who by his laws, as well as by his victories, restored a transient splendour to the Eastern Empire. It will comprehend the invasion of Italy by the Lombards, the conquest of the Asiatic and African provinces by the Arabs, who embraced the religion of Mahomet; the revolt of the Roman people against the feeble princes of Constantinople; and the elevation of Charlemagne, who, in the year eight hundred, established the second or German Empire in the West.
>
> III. The last and longest of these periods includes about six centuries and a half; from the revival of the Western Empire, till the taking of Constantinople by the Turks, and the extinction of a degenerate race of princes, who continued to assume the titles of Caesar and Augustus, after their dominions were contracted to the limits of a single city; in which the language, as well as manners, of the ancient Romans, had been long since forgotten. The writer who should undertake to relate the events of this period, would find himself obliged to enter into the general history of the Crusades, as far as they contributed to the ruin of the Greek Empire; and he would scarcely be able to restrain his curiosity from making some inquiry into the state of the city of Rome, during the darkness and confusion of the middle ages.

No doubt these words were written, like most prefaces, after the completion of the volume they introduce; but they look far beyond it. Gibbon went on to say that since he had

> ventured, perhaps too hastily, to commit to the press, a work, which, in every sense of the word, deserves the epithet of imperfect, I consider myself as contracting an engagement to finish, most probably in a second volume, the first of these memorable periods; and to deliver to the Public, the complete history of the Decline and Fall of Rome, from the age of the Antonines, to the subversion of the Western Empire.

Robertson used similar language in the following year, when he explained the difficulties he had encountered 'in fulfilling the engagement which I had come under to the Public with respect to the History of America'.[1] By this time a powerful group of Scottish booksellers – Millar, Strahan, Cadell – were organising the London as well as the Edinburgh market and paying authors unparalleled sums for their copyright. It is the British equivalent of 'the business of Enlightenment', and 'the Public' is largely their creation. It would require a history of authorship, publishing and readership in eighteenth-century Britain to explain exactly why an ecclesiastical dignitary like Robertson, or a leisured rentier gentleman like Gibbon, should consider himself entering upon an 'engagement' with the 'Public' which something obliged him to fulfil. He continued:

> With regard to the subsequent periods, though I may entertain some hopes, I dare not presume to give any assurances. The execution of the extensive plan which I have described, would connect the ancient and modern history of the World; but it would require many years of health, of leisure, and of perseverance.

Gibbon lived to enjoy those years, and in 1781 he prefaced a new set of volumes by remarking:

> The entire History, which is now published, of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire in the West, abundantly discharges my engagements with the Public. Perhaps their favourable opinion may encourage me to prosecute a work, which, however laborious it may seem, is the most agreeable occupation of my leisure hours.[2]

Here 'the Public' were not offered a new engagement, but merely invited to encourage the author to continue the 'amusement' of his leisure; in pursuit of which he moved once more to Lausanne and found no small difficulty in completing the volumes published in 1788. The language of 1781 underlines both Gibbon's resolution to maintain his amateur and gentleman status, and the deeply problematic character of the third stage of the project he had announced in 1776. It has been held by a severe critic that he was unable to complete his work as a unity.[3]

[1] *Works*, VI, 'Preface', sig. B2.

[2] For all quotations from *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, 'Preface', see Womersley, I, pp. 1–3; Bury, I, pp. xxxix–xli. [3] Ghosh, 1983, 1991, 1996, 1997a and b.

The historical fact remains that he did announce and did, however imperfectly, execute his project; so that the value of the critical judgment is that it focuses historical attention on the difficulties the project encountered and what Gibbon did in the attempt to overcome them.

In what it says and what it does not say, the preface of 1776 announces Gibbon's intention of writing something other than 'the Enlightened narrative'. Readers of the precursor to the present volume may be reminded of the *Memoirs'* account of his juvenile encounter with Howel's *History of the World*,[4] in which un-Enlightened source Gibbon might have discovered the difficulties of a parallel periodisation of the eastern and western empires. Like Howel, though on quite another scale, he meant to fix a turning-point at the reign of Justinian, whose destruction of the Gothic kingdom in Italy did more than the termination of the line of western emperors to prepare the way – through the complicated politics of Iconoclasts and Popes, Lombards and Franks – for the rise of a western ecclesiastical monarchy. At this point the 'Enlightened narrative' could begin, with Giannone as its oracle, pointing the way towards Muratori no less than Voltaire. Gibbon, however, has indicated, not too directly, that the 'imperfect' volume appearing in 1776 is a long way from reaching this turning-point. In the event it took him two more volumes, those of 1781, to arrive at the deposition of the last western emperor, and the reign of Justinian was covered only in the first of three volumes appearing in 1788. The second and third periods announced in the project of 1776 – that from Justinian to Charlemagne, the true beginning as Gibbon and Voltaire both maintained of 'modern history', and that from Charlemagne to the fall of Constantinople, the age of 'barbarism and religion' surveyed in the *Essai sur les moeurs* – were dealt with only in the two last volumes of 1788, the fifth and sixth of the *Decline and Fall.*

Something had happened, probably close to the inception of the work, to ensure that Gibbon's deeply Enlightened history would have another structure than that of the Enlightened histories he studied and used. Something else was happening – and this he did not particularise – to ensure that the project he was announcing would prove harder to execute than he had yet found ways of acknowledging. The preface of 1776 declares that another volume (in the event three) will be needed to reach the end of the first of the three periods into which it divides history. What it does not say is that the volume it introduces reaches no

[4] *EEG*, pp. 33–40.

farther than the accession of Constantine and that the account of post-apostolic Christianity with which it concludes is preliminary. We are faced with a problem: that of the decisions which made the *Decline and Fall* a history of late antiquity rather than of modernity.

The point from which all began – there is some evidence to support the account in the *Memoirs* – was a vision, first literary and then actual, of the buildings of Rome, their imperial grandeur and their present condition.[5] Before the lootings of the barbarians and the supposed dilapidation of the clergy and their miserable congregations, there had occurred another process, whereby the great buildings had been abandoned and emptied of meaning as the centres of empire moved away from Rome, as far as Constantinople, Antioch and Alexandria, and these cities became the true theatres of Decline and Fall. At some point which we seem unable to date, the history of the city was overwhelmed in Gibbon's mind by the history of the empire; the *grandeur et décadence* of the latter explained the greatness and decline of the former. There were two consequences, one spatial and the other temporal. The history of the city became the history of its empire; Gibbon *érudit* had embarked on a study of the roads and garrisons by which Rome had maintained empire in Italy, and Gibbon *historien* moved out from the history of the city to the history of a civilisation, Mediterranean, Euro-Asian and Euro-African. Here he encountered the barbarians; the military structure of the empire could be described as an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to control and exclude them. If Goths and later Vandals, later still Saracens and Normans (and in the year after Gibbon's death, Jacobins on the point of becoming Bonapartists), had reached Rome and entered it, it was necessary to explain who they were and where they came from; and this enterprise was already in 1776 proving to involve the history of Eurasian nomadism and the history of the stages of society that were enlarging philosophical history into anthropology and turning the Enlightened narrative into a Eurocentric history of the human race. Gibbon's remark that to complete his project in full 'would connect the ancient and modern history of the World' has several meanings; this is one of them.

The enlargement into history of the empire meant a stress on late antiquity rather than on post-antique modernity, but this alone did not carry Gibbon away from the concerns of Giannone, Voltaire or Hume. The temporal consequence of this enlargement did more to shape his

[5] *EEG*, pp. 272–4, 281–4.

first volume than the spatial. The empire of Rome was the achievement of its republic; the decline of the republic and its replacement by the Augustan principate were the consequences of empire; the decline of the principate, and its failure to maintain the armies which should have kept the barbarians out – the process of Decline and Fall itself as conventionally understood – were the continuations of processes visible in the history of ancient Rome. The spots where Gibbon trod in October 1764, 'where Romulus stood, or Tully spoke, or Caesar fell',[6] were both the symbols and the actual locations of this history, challenges to what he had already defended as 'the imagination and the judgment'. Gibbon as humanist was necessitated to become Gibbon as historian and as philosopher.

The Enlightened narrative might begin with Constantine, or Justinian, or Charlemagne, as Gibbon clearly knew; his volume of 1776 had almost reached the first of these starting points. He however had begun much further back: with the republic; and like Montesquieu, whose pupil he was never so completely as at this point, he was confronting himself with the Machiavellian moment, that is, with the need Enlightenment was under to show itself superior to the ancient virtue of the Romans, which it recognised as its principal moral and philosophical challenger the more it moved away from the values of ecclesiastical Christianity. Hume's *Essays* furnish us with an Enlightened response to this challenge; and it may be possible to examine an Enlightened historiography of ancient Rome, and assess the *Decline and Fall* itself as furnishing a further response. For the present we know only that neither Giannone nor Voltaire in the *Essai sur les moeurs* had tackled the problem, and that Hume's response to it lies outside the *History of England*. The *Decline and Fall*, however, looks back towards the republic and concerns itself with the decay of the principate, and has difficulty knowing where to start. Behind 'the age of Trajan and the Antonines', mentioned in the preface, lie the Flavians and the Julio-Claudians, and Gibbon often asked himself whether he ought not to have begun his narrative from Vespasian, or Nero, or Augustus himself. Behind the Antonines lay also the figure of the greatest of both ancient and philosophical historians, and all Gibbon's possible starting points are episodes in the narrative of Tacitus, who had lived under Trajan, written of the fall of Nero, and deduced his explanatory narrative from the destruction of republican liberty by Augustus. Gibbon, struggling to

[6] *Memoirs*, p. 134.

write, confronted all these figures and the problems they stood for; and beginning in the last age of ancient virtue, provided a narrative more Tacitean and Montesquieuan, though in no way less Enlightened, than any we have so far considered. Voltaire, Hume and on the whole Robertson began in an age when the historians were not worth reading and history itself hardly to be enacted; Gibbon began in the age of Tacitus, Livy and Polybius, and, with Ammianus Marcellinus as a bridge figure, traced the plunge through the *Historia Augusta* into the world of the ecclesiastical, and beneath even them, the monkish historians.

The Enlightened narrative begins, where the *Decline and Fall* rhetorically ends, with the 'triumph' – which can also be a nadir – 'of barbarism and religion'; that is, of feudal and papal values in the Latin west. Preoccupied, as Gibbon often was, with the challenge of ecclesiastical authority to civil society, the Enlightened historians (even Robertson) set the writing of history in opposition to clerical values; and so, many times, did Gibbon. But the latter's historiography is also turned towards a complex relationship with the values of ancient Rome, republican, imperial and pagan; and it is now that we encounter the most puzzling omission from the preface of 1776. That manifesto has been quoted in full, and it contains not one word about the Christian religion. Neither do the first fourteen chapters of the volume it introduces; yet these are followed by the famous, or notorious, chapters 15 and 16, always (and not unjustifiably) read as expressing an Enlightened antagonism to Christianity taken to be the key to the *Decline and Fall* and to Gibbon's intentions in writing it. If this is so, the silence of the preface and the project presents a problem. There were things Gibbon was prepared to say about his attitude towards Christianity; why are they not said here, even by way of innuendo? The *argumentum ex silentio* is always reversible, and attempts have been made to represent the silence of the preface and fourteen chapters as indicating the depth of Gibbon's unbelief and the sophistication of his authorial strategies;[7] an approach often linked to the question whether he regarded the spread of Christianity as a contributory or principal cause of the Decline and Fall itself. An alternative to this reading is to suppose that he saw the new religion not so much as weakening the structure of the empire as altogether replacing its culture; a further alternative is to suggest that though he had, since at latest 1762, been interested in the philosophical history of

[7] Womersley, 1988.

religion, and had absorbed with the air he breathed the Protestant, Erastian and Enlightened concern with the history of how ecclesiastical authority had replaced civil and civil again ecclesiastical, he was nevertheless for some reason slow to realise that his history of how empire had eroded city would become a history of how church had replaced empire and transformed the architecture of the city. The bare-footed friars in the ancient temple must move centre stage before the *Decline and Fall* could become an Enlightened narrative. They did not do so before the volumes of 1781.

To suppose that the history of Christianity is delayed in making its appearance has the disadvantage that it leaves chapters 15 and 16 more enigmatic than before, but the advantage that it returns us to the structure of the 1776 preface. The linkage of 'the revolt of the Roman people against the feeble princes of Constantinople' – an allusion less than fair to the formidable Isaurians – with 'the elevation of Charlemagne' to 'the second or German Empire in the West' focuses attention on the role of the popes, who played a leading part in both episodes. But it may also have helped Gibbon to realise that from Constantine to Justinian was a long time, and from Justinian to Charlemagne another, and that the connecting narrative simply could not be reduced to the rise and role of the papacy. As we work our way through the two volumes of 1781, and the first of the three of 1788, the *Decline and Fall* increasingly ceases to be a civil and becomes an ecclesiastical history, Enlightened in spirit, but not an Enlightened narrative as we have come to know them. It is Greek, not Latin; a history of Councils, not Popes, and of theology, not jurisdiction. Its subject is how theological dispute arose and enhanced the power of bishops, patriarchs, holy men and monks beyond the power of emperors to control them; the empire that is weakened by religion is not the Antonine principate but the empire of the Constantinean monarchs.

The *Memoirs* tell us that Gibbon became fascinated by the Christian empire as a boy visiting Stourhead; the project of 1776 does not tell us that the church is about to dominate the progress of the work as a whole. As the *Decline and Fall* became an ecclesiastical history, Gibbon's operative terminology, and the events of his narrative themselves, were increasingly drawn from the discourse of clerical historians, historians of the church and of theology. It could not be otherwise, since this was the narrative he had to recount; and as his narrative changed, so of necessity did his erudition. This was a term of many meanings, and the older clerisies understood them better than did the *philosophes* trying to do

without it; in Gibbon's case it moved from meaning the antiquarian learning descending from the Renaissance grammarians through the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, to meaning the ecclesiastical scholarship he derived from clerics of many and various persuasions. The Momiglianan problem now becomes that of how Gibbon contrived to write an Enlightened narrative in the language of clerical scholarship – often to the extreme displeasure of the latter's adepts. It is this again which the 1776 preface gives us no cause to expect; was Gibbon concealing his intentions or did he not yet know what they were?

The Enlightened narrative was a western narrative, relating the rise and decline of feudal and papal power in the Latin provinces (including old Rome) of the former empire; it did not have much to say about the expansion of Latin Christian culture through Saxony into Baltic and Central Europe. It is being suggested here that Gibbon came to see the history of the church as a story Greek before it was Latin, but was not ready to announce that change in perception when writing the preface of 1776. That text, however, does seem to prefigure the later *Decline and Fall*'s most important departure from Catholic, Protestant or Enlightened narrative. The discernibly Howellian language in which Gibbon presents the third section of his projected history, that from Charlemagne to the fall of Constantinople, does not do much to suggest that it has an Enlightened origin; but it does inform us that there will be no 'Enlightened narrative' of the 'Christian millennium', or the exit from it, in the Latin provinces, but that the story told will be that of the eastern or Byzantine empire, the Christian monarchy set up by Constantine, and the Arab Muslim offensive against both Christian empires – a subject which had fascinated Gibbon since he read d'Herbelot, Pococke and Ockley as a boy,[8] and entailed greater changes in the map of the world than all the Germanic invasions put together. Nor would this story extend past 1453 into the world of Charles V or Louis XIV; Gibbon would write in that Enlightened history, but not of it. In the event, however, he would find himself without a macronarrative history of the eastern empire, and would be obliged to re-tell Latin, Arab and Turkish histories as those of its invaders. The project of 1776 comes back to life in the last sentence of its third section, when it most arrestingly informs us that a historian who has come to the end of the history of the second Rome will be obliged to return to the municipal history of the first. Gibbon in 1776 is signalling exactly what he did do in the last

[8] *EEG*, pp. 40–2.

volume of 1788, when he returned to his imaginative starting point like a new Virgil, Rutilius or Bargaeus, to envisage the buildings of Rome abandoned by the emperors, damaged by the Goths under siege by Justinian's armies, vastly enlarged but furnished with neither virtue nor commerce by the popes.[9] The narrative of Enlightenment is there to the last, but incorporated in a narrative very different, sentimental, dramatic and ironic.

[9] *Decline and Fall*, vol. VI, chs. 69–71.

CHAPTER 26

'Gibbon's dark ages': the writings of 1765–1772

Gibbon returned to England from Paris, Lausanne and Rome with – as far as we can tell – three sorts of historiography on his agenda. There was the project, known to us as the 'Recueil géographique' or *Nomina gentesque*, for an antiquarian survey of Italian topography under Roman domination; this seems to have been given up very soon after his Italian journey.[10] There was at least the germ of the idea of a history of the city of Rome as rendered obsolete by the growth and disintegration of empire,[11] which was to become the overshadowing tree of the *Decline and Fall*, a history of church as well as empire and Europe as well as Rome. Thirdly, there was the projected history of Swiss liberty, left behind in England, to which Gibbon was briefly and significantly to return. The three together present the polarity of highly ancient and highly modern history, between which his interests can be seen moving and constructing the *Decline and Fall*, itself lying at neither extreme.

The years between his return in 1765 and the publication of his first volume in 1776 have been termed 'Gibbon's dark ages',[12] partly because they are ill documented – he gave up keeping a working journal of his studies on reaching Rome and never resumed it[13] – and partly because they contain questions to which they do not supply the answers. In consequence we are obliged to frame the questions for ourselves, and it is possible that some of them have been *mal posées*. We are faced with a double myth – or perhaps the myth of a myth, constructed so that it may be demolished – of Gibbon after 1764 preoccupied with the project by which he had been inspired on the Capitol, and of Gibbon as the serene master of a neo-classical art form, devising the plan of a great history and proceeding with unhurried steps to carry it out. While this need not long detain us – the work of demolition has been done[14] – the fact

[10] *EEG*, pp. 285, 287–8. [11] *EEG*, pp. 272–4, 284–6. [12] Ghosh, 1983. [13] *EEG*, p. 281.
[14] Craddock, *YEG*, ch. 12, reviews Gibbon's studies on his return to England. See Ghosh, 1983, pp. 1–3. His argument is directed against Giarrizzo's belief that Gibbon from 1765 intended a history of Europe from antiquity to modernity, and contends that his ancient interests were paramount and his modern fragmentary. The present study seeks to steer between Giarrizzo's Charybdis and Ghosh's Scylla.

remains that in 1776 Gibbon announced a plan, and proceeded to confront the difficulties, not all of them anticipated, of its execution.

In this book we have isolated a master pattern, that of 'the Enlightened narrative', of which Gibbon was certainly aware but the *Decline and Fall* is not an instance. It does not follow that the history of his 'dark ages' is the record of a series of steps away from it – he arrived in Rome a classical *érudit* rather than a *philosophe* historian – but it figures among a number of alternative historiographies between which he was long in hesitation, so that, as he himself tells us, the *Decline and Fall* took shape slowly and uncertainly; even in 1776 he did not see it as it was to be. The myth of the neo-classical olympian has already disintegrated. Aspects of this difficult process – but not perhaps the history of its central tensions – are revealed to us by a number of historical works he wrote (and in one case published) between 1765 and 1772; for when Gibbon gave up recording his studies in a journal, he did not give up the practice of developing them into dissertations. These essays survived his death; they were collected by Lord Sheffield,[15] and some of them have been edited by Patricia Craddock. Biographers, intellectual historians, and their critics[16] have all made use of them, and they will be considered here.

The preferred objective in studying them is to throw light on the genesis of the *Decline and Fall*. This light they may or may not provide, and the genesis itself, being partly a biographic matter, is invaded by biographic considerations. In Gibbon's personal life, a hiatus is provided by the death of his father in 1770; within two years Edward Gibbon III had moved to London, and his statement that he now began serious work on his Roman history must contain much truth. In the history of his intellectual practice, a further turning-point is provided by his decision to write in English rather than French. In 1767, he told David Hume 'I write in French because I think in French',[17] but within the next two years the essays become preponderantly English. Somewhere along the sequence of which this is a moment Gibbon acquired the English style which he possessed by 1776, which even those who disliked it recognised as the instrument of a master, and which was to carry him through the six volumes of his history. In considering the

[15] *MW*, III and IV. It is necessary to consider and sometimes dismiss Sheffield's dating and other editorial decisions, with which all Gibbon's biographers have been obliged to deal.

[16] The isolation of Gibbon's *English Essays* (*EE*) has led to the realisation (shared by Craddock as editor) that we need a critical edition of his minor writings without distinction of language. This lack should be remedied. [17] *Letters*, II, p. 222.

formation of Momigliano's Gibbon, the growth of a style that permitted the integration of philosophy and erudition in narrative must be considered crucial. In this and in other matters, the writings of the 'dark ages' have things to tell us.

They display an oscillation rather than a sequence of interests. The *Mémoires littéraires de la Grande Bretagne*, edited by Gibbon and Georges Deyverdun in 1767–8, contain the reviews already studied, that of Lyttelton's *Henry II* which Gibbon says he wrote, and that of Ferguson's *Essay* whose authorship is uncertain. The same must be said of a further review, that of Nathaniel Lardner's *Large Collection of Ancient Jewish and Heathen Testimonies to the Truth of the Christian Religion.*[18] Lardner was an Independent minister with Arian leanings in theology, of whose works, including a history of the heresies, Gibbon was to make use in the *Decline and Fall*. If we suppose that he read, since it is not known that he wrote, this review, his eye might have been caught by its treatment of Julian the Apostate, a flawed near-hero of Gibbon's work;[19] by the observation that Christian testimony to the miracles performed in their own church is damaged by their acceptance of pagan prodigies as the maleficent works of demons;[20] and by the observation regarding the last pagan authors:

> On a souvent fait à ces Ecrivains l'honneur de les croire Philosophes. Hélas, ils en etoient bien eloignés. Incredules sur le Christianisme, ils etoient superstitieux sur tout le reste. Les Mystères, les Purifications, la Theurgie, les Demons, les Prodiges, et les Visions etoient les objets les plus respectés de leur foi. Je vois entre Platon et les Sophistes qui oserent dans le cinquième siècle usurper le nom de ses disciples, je vois la même difference qu'entre le grand Arnauld et les Convulsionnaires de St Medart.[21]
>
> [We have often done these authors the honour of considering them philosophers. Alas, they were far from deserving it. Incredulous of Christianity, they were superstitious in all else. Mysteries, purifications, theurgy, demons, prodigies and visions, were the darling objects of their faith. I see between Plato and the sophists who in the fifth century dared to usurp the name of his disciples, the same difference as that between the great Arnauld and the convulsionaries of St Medard.][22]

In the *Decline and Fall*, Gibbon was to present neo-Platonism as evidence of intellectual decline before ever he wrote of Christianity.[23] In 1767, there had passed through his hands, at least as editor, a study of an

[18] Lardner, 1764–7. [19] *Mém. litt.*, pp. 99–101. [20] *Mém. litt.*, p. 94.
[21] *Mém. litt.*, p. 107. [22] All translations in this chapter by JGAP.
[23] *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. 13 (Womersley, I, pp. 398–9; Bury, I, pp. 423–4.)

important treatise – like that of Beausobre, which he had already read[24] – on the complicated history of Hellenist philosophy and Christian theology. This is also the year, however, in which he wound up and then abandoned – after the adverse judgment of 'a literary society of foreigners in London'[25] – his projected history of Swiss liberty.[26] This had been on his mind since his militia service,[27] and though it is likely that he had persevered with it after his return from Italy out of friendship with Deyverdun – who was to have helped him with the sources in German, which he did not read – its importance in the present chapter is that it shows him considering, and then abandoning, a subject in the modern history of Europe: the emergence of state and civil government from the conditions of the Christian millennium. It is not quite true, as has been suggested, that 'there was no connection between the history of medieval Switzerland and the mainstream of European history, in which Gibbon was so well read';[28] the abandoned text situates it, not only 'au milieu de l'Europe, entre la France, l'Italie, et l'Allemagne',[29] but at a central point in the medieval sequence of the Enlightened narrative. Swiss history begins at the downfall of the Hohenstaufen.

Fréderic II étoit digne d'un autre siècle et d'un sort plus heureux, mais il combattit avec plus de constance que de bonheur contre l'ambition des grands, la fanatisme des peuples, et la politique de la cour de Rome. Les villes italiannes, devenues riches de leur commerce, et fières de leurs richesses, se rangeaient avec ardeur sous l'étendard des pontifes qui étoit pour eux celui de la liberté.[30]

[Frederick II was worthy of a better age and a happier fate, but he struggled with more constancy than fortune against the ambition of the princes, the fanaticism of the peoples, and the policy of the Roman Curia. The Italian cities, enriched by their commerce and proud of their wealth, gladly ranged themselves under the pontifical banner which was for them the flag of liberty.]

It is the germ of the sentence late in the *Decline and Fall* which remarks that 'the Guelfs displayed the banner of liberty and the church'.[31] Gibbon's interest in the association between liberty and superstition was philosophic as well as ironic; it may have owed something to Hume, but what is going on here is the movement from Giannone towards Muratori. The latter is cited[32] in a passage which ascribes to ecclesiasti-

[24] *EEG*, pp. 66, 234.
[25] *Memoirs*, p. 141; *TEG*, pp. 253–6. Not much seems to be known of this society and its members.
[26] *MW*, III, pp. 239–330. [27] *EEG*, pp. 127–9. [28] Ghosh, 1983, p. 8. [29] *MW*, III, p. 239.
[30] *MW*, III, pp. 240–1. [31] *Decline and Fall*, V, ch. 49; Womersley, III, p. 144; Bury, V, p. 324.
[32] *MW*, III, p. 248n., with a highly Voltairean comment.

cal protection and promotion of culture the rise of free cities with their arts and commerce.

On vit naître des citoyens, des loix, et des ramparts. La plûpart des villes de l'Autriche et de la Suisse n'ont point d'autre origine. L'humanité dirai-je, ou la politique, de leurs maîtres les affranchit bientôt de la servitude à laquelle elles s'étoient condamnées, et l'industrie, qui marche à la suite de la liberté, leur fournit la moyen de se racheter des devoirs les plus onereux.[33]

[We behold the birth of citizens, laws and ramparts. The greater part of the towns of Austria and Switzerland have no other origin. The humanity, or should I say policy, of their masters, soon enfranchised them from the servitude to which they had been condemned, and industry, following in the steps of liberty, furnished the means of redeeming themselves from their more onerous obligations.]

Muratori – and soon it would be Robertson – was drawing Gibbon towards a theory of medieval liberty unequivocally Guelfic and unequivocally *bourgeois*. There were imperial as well as ecclesiastical free cities,[34] but the theme of the Swiss history looks towards that of another uncompleted work of Gibbon's later years: the *Antiquities of the House of Brunswick*, from its Este and Welf beginnings, which was to have relied on Muratori and Leibniz and arrived at the Hanoverian monarchy of Great Britain.[35] Though Gibbon never wrote an 'Enlightened narrative', he had his own perception of it and his own plans for it. The history of Switzerland was not to have been entirely *bourgeois*; there were the robust peasant communes of the forest cantons, and we hear of their original association as a true social contract, in which free men bind themselves to observe civil laws,[36] whereas the later associations between the cantons and Lucerne, Zurich and Berne are treaties of confederations between already formed political bodies.[37] This is a republican and burgher history, supplementing a narrative predominantly that of the formation of the great western monarchies; was it perhaps this which failed to interest the literary foreigners of London (whoever they were)? From a later allusion in Gibbon's writings,[38] we can see where Swiss history would have re-entered the European mainstream; with the wars against Charles the Bold, that made the Burgundian inheritance the theatre of rivalry between the French and Habs-

[33] *MW*, III, p. 249. [34] *MW*, III, pp. 249–50.
[35] *EE*, pp. 398–531; *MW*, III, pp. 353–531; BL Add. MSS., 34880.
[36] *MW*, III, pp. 251–2 (the forest cantons), 280–1 (the social contract). [37] *MW*, III, p. 288.
[38] *MW*, III, pp. 50–1 (*Outlines of the History of the World*).

burg monarchies, and the wars in Italy that would have added Guicciardini to Commines among Gibbon's masters in modern historiography. The Swiss history, however, breaks off in the middle of the fourteenth century, significantly with the accession to the confederation of the city of Berne, always regarded by Gibbon with a Lausannais eye.

It is not the last of his writings in this period on the 'modern' history of the Christian millennium and the formation of Europe. There is a highly Muratorian treatise *Du gouvernement féodal*,[39] which emphasises the diverse fates of feudalism in France, Italy, England and Germany, and reminds us how Gibbon would develop his awareness of the last of these, about which the Enlightened narrative had otherwise so little to say. But before we reach the change from French to English as Gibbon's preferred medium, there is a major and apparently publishable treatise on history undeniably ancient: the *Mémoire sur la monarchie des Mèdes, pour servir de supplément aux dissertations de MM. Freret et de Bougainville.*[40] There is the question of how far we are to bring Gibbon's oscillations between modern and ancient history to bear on his presumed abandonment of the Swiss history – and the Enlightened narrative? – in favour of the Roman history and the *Decline and Fall.* The themes of the *Monarchie des Mèdes* are ancient indeed, but oriental. It is a tissue of essays held together by the connecting threads of Persian history; primarily an enquiry into the chronology of ancient empires, as that pre-Enlightened discipline had been practised by Enlightened minds in the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. The memoirs of that body formed as we know one of the theatres in which Gibbon's mind as a reader was always most at home, and in this work he performed homage to two of its former secretaries: Freret, the great figure of the generation before his own, and Bougainville, brother of the navigator, whom he had met in 1763. Caylus is also mentioned,[41] and this part of the essay shows critical minds at work on sources they could not yet abandon. The work broadens into a survey of the history of Persia from the Scythians to the Arabs, and we feel the hand of de Guignes[42] when we read:

> Un conquerant s'élève sur les bords glacés des mers de la Corée; la tonnerre gronde, la terre s'ébranle, mille nations se précipitent les uns sur les autres, et les derniers des fuyards écrasent le midi, l'orient et l'occident.[43]

[39] *MW*, III, pp. 183–202; *TEG*, pp. 245–6; Ghosh, 1983, p. 4.
[40] *MW*, III, pp. 56–149; *TEG*, pp. 247–51; Baridon, pp. 263–7; Ghosh, 1983, pp. 10–11.
[41] *MW*, III, pp. 57–8 (Freret, Bougainville), 79–81 (Caylus).
[42] *MW* III, p. 119 (marginal note).
[43] *MW*, III, p. 118.

> [A conqueror arises on the frozen coasts of the Korean sea; the thunder rumbles, the earth is shaken, a thousand nations are flung upon one another, and the latest fugitives trample on the south, the east and the west.]

Gibbon was allowing his pen to run on the theme of Eurasian nomad history. Another interest, in the relations of philosophy and historiography, dominates the third part of the *Monarchie des Mèdes*, a dissertation on the reliability of Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, which becomes a study in the writing of history by philosophers, especially when the *philosophe* is, like Xenophon, also a *condottiere.*[44] The Arab conquest introduces us to Gibbon's old masters, d'Herbelot, Pococke and Ockley,[45] and the survival of Zoroastrian religion to Beausobre.[46] This *Mémoire* is an exercise in philosophic erudition, written in the role of the *académicien* Gibbon never was and dealing with themes important to the outer but not the inner shaping of the *Decline and Fall*; it does not tell us that Gibbon had resolved to write the latter, though it deals with many things that came to be incorporated in it. The Swiss history, on the other hand, tells us what would have been in Gibbon's history of western Europe had he ever written it.

The alternation between ancient and modern themes does not disappear when the language of Gibbon's occasional essays changes from French to English. This change did not occur all at once; there is an English *Digression on the Character of Brutus* which may antedate some of the French writings;[47] and in locating the decisive shift in 1768–9, following the abandonment of the Swiss history, we are not obliged to connect it with any resolve to devote himself to the *Decline and Fall.* Nevertheless, the English style which then, and fairly rapidly, took shape was one intended for the conduct of a grand historical narrative, and we must take account of Gibbon's earlier avowal to Hume that he wrote in French because he thought in French. He now resolved to think in English while he wrote in English; it is hard to read the *Decline and Fall* without the sense that its style is the product of a powerful interior monologue. Gibbon uttered in his own mind the oratory he could never pronounce in public; it became the vehicle of both narrative and philosophy, while erudition descended into the footnotes, which developed a style, rhetoric and irony of their own.

The first English work we can date with precision is the *Critical*

[44] *MW*, III, pp. 125–32.
[45] E.g., *MW*, III, p. 82 (marginal note).
[46] *MW*, III, p. 74 (marginal note). References also occur to Goguet, Mosheim (in English translation), and Voltaire's history of Peter the Great.
[47] *MW*, IV, pp. 95–112; *TEG*, pp. 239–40; Ghosh, 1983, p. 14.

Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid, published anonymously in London during 1770.[48] This is focused upon Augustan Rome, but not on the history of city or empire. It is concerned with the criticism of literature and the history of literature, being an attack upon some passages in William Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*,[49] with which strange and flawed work of undisciplined genius we re-enter with Gibbon the clerical disputes of English Enlightenment.[50] Warburton had argued that the Sibylline visions of Aeneas's descent into the underworld were an allegorical representation of the Eleusinian mysteries known only to initiates, and had made this case as part of a larger thesis concerning ancient religion. Since at least the time of the Cambridge Platonists and Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe*,[51] there had been an Anglican need to maintain that Greek philosophy was compatible with a monotheist doctrine of the first cause; and Warburton maintained that the mysteries preserved this doctrine, teaching it in the esoteric form necessary in an age of polytheist superstition. It was a problem for theists and sceptics alike to explain the rise of a monotheism which could be publicly taught to the vulgar. Gibbon, to judge from the early *Decline and Fall*, disliked the idea of a proto-Christian philosophy which could be expressed only in mysteries and allegories; he may already have shared the Humean and Enlightened conviction that those who used the language of mystery ended by believing it themselves; he preferred to see the magistrates of antiquity as silent sceptics rather than public mystagogues; and he had for some time been studying the work of Isaac de Beausobre as his guide to ancient polytheism and ancient philosophy in conjunction. Disliking also Warburton's blustering certainties and the bullying tone for which he and his lieutenant Richard Hurd were notorious, Gibbon wrote an anonymous critique of Warburton's system, very much in the derisive tones of literary and clerical controversy, in which he argued, first, that Virgil would not have revealed, even obliquely, the mysteries in which he had been initiated; second, that Virgil was like most of the Roman elite an Epicurean, believing in no first cause but a universe of living matter, anticipating the modern doctrines of Spinoza.[52] Warburton had levelled the same charge against ancient sceptics and modern deists from Toland to Bolingbroke; and once it is questioned whether 'deism' connotes a rational theism or a materialist pantheism, a natural religion or a religion of nature, we enter the terrain in which it must be decided

[48] *EE*, pp. 131–62. [49] Warburton, 1738–41. [50] Young, 1998; for Gibbon, pp. 206–12.
[51] For Cudworth, 1679, see Ealy, 1997. [52] *EE*, pp. 145–7, 150.

how Gibbon's own unbelief is to be characterised.[53] There is the possibility that, like Hume, he was sceptical of deism in both forms.

Whether or not Gibbon intended the *Critical Observations*, or the letter of 1772 to Hurd casting doubt on the Book of Daniel,[54] to offer a sustained philosophical or historical critique of religion, these English writings are couched in the tones of controversy rather than history. They do not shape the narrative of the *Decline and Fall*'s first volume, but they may be seen as lying behind the accounts there given of Roman polytheism and statecraft, and of the 'eastern' philosophy of Zoroaster;[55] and though unconnected with the account of Christianity in Gibbon's fifteenth and sixteenth chapters, they have something to do with the charges of 'infidelity' and 'deism' these were to bring down on him. They are concerned with ancient history; do they mean that Gibbon had put away modern history with the Swiss project, to concentrate upon the *Decline and Fall* down to 476? Here we enter on debate concerning a massive essay found among his manuscripts, and its possible connection with his first volume and the project there announced.

The *Outlines of the History of the World*, surveying it century by century from the ninth to the fifteenth, may be found critically edited among his English essays.[56] In chapter 30 of the *Decline and Fall* Gibbon mentions 'a rough draft of the present history' completed 'as early as 1771',[57] and Patricia Craddock has cautiously accepted an identification of the *Outlines* with this draft,[58] dating them to the months after his father's death, when the *Memoirs* tell us he settled to work on his Roman history. Previous scholars had accepted this identification, notably Giuseppe Giarrizzo, who saw in it evidence that Gibbon from the outset intended what the project of 1776 indeed adumbrates, a massive survey of European history from the Antonine principate to the end of the Constantinean monarchy;[59] the *Outlines* became 'a rough draft' of the whole work as envisaged. This thesis has now been questioned by P. R. Ghosh, who contends that Gibbon did not simply conceive this scheme and proceed to execute it; the myth of the neo-classical master is under

[53] See the essays by Turnbull, Wootton, Imbruglia and Womersley in Womersley, 1997.
[54] *Letters*, I, pp. 327–9. *YEG*, pp. 297–300.
[55] *Decline and Fall*, vol. I, ch. 8; Womersley, I, pp. 215–21; Bury, I, pp. 213–20.
[56] *EE*, pp. 163–98. Sheffield's edition is in *MW*, III, pp. 1–55.
[57] *Decline and Fall*, vol. III, ch. 30, n. 86; Womersley, II, p. 148; Bury, III, p. 283.
[58] *EE*, p. 57; *YEG*, pp. 289–94, suggesting that the *Outlines* are part of the 1771 sketch. See p. 291 for the point that the *Outlines* survey ground never covered in the *Decline and Fall*.
[59] Giarrizzo, 1954, pp. 201–13. He aims to show, first, that Gibbon from the outset intended a history of Europe to the dawn of modernity; second, that he was still carrying out exercises in the discipline founded by Montesquieu, and enlarged his vision only later.

attack. In Ghosh's scenario, Gibbon conceived a history of city and empire (the latter leading inexorably away from the former) but planned it no further than the end of the western emperors in 476. When he looked further, he saw in a glass darkly, and the difficulties there lurking were greater than he knew till he confronted them; the extinction of the western empire did not lead directly to the age of barbarism and religion, and the history of the latter was more Greek than it was Latin, pointing towards the advent of Islam rather than the papacy. Gibbon was thus led towards a Byzantine rather than a papal–Frankish history of the middle ages; for this he was unprepared and he found great difficulty in constructing it. It is a detail of Ghosh's interpretation that the *Outlines of the History of the World* should not be a preliminary sketch of the *Decline and Fall* as a whole, and he suggests[60] – partly on the evidence of handwriting – that they were written perhaps as late as 1784, as an encapsulation of the second and third periods envisaged in the 1776 preface, with which Gibbon was coming to deal only after completing the volumes of 1781 and reaching the end of the western empire (though not the age of Justinian).

The evidence from handwriting appears at present inconclusive;[61] but there is clearly much to be said for the view that Gibbon found the project of 1776 easier to envisage than to execute. The structure of this book, however, with its detailed expositions of the works of Giannone, Voltaire, Hume and Robertson, all known to Gibbon by the time he abandoned the Swiss history, renders it very hard to believe that he was not well acquainted with what has here been called 'the Enlightened narrative', and its outlines may be detected in the 1776 preface. The *Outlines of the History of the World* sketch an ambitious and original version of that narrative. The term 'world' looks beyond 'the ancient and modern history of the world' which Gibbon in 1776 imagined his work connecting;[62] that could have been a linear and European history, but the *Outlines* begin:

The more civilized part of the Globe was divided between the Christians and

[60] Ghosh, 1983, pp. 20–3.

[61] Sheffield suggested on the same basis that the *Outlines* were written in 1758 to 1761. (It is curious that Sheffield, who had been reading Gibbon's letters for many years, had a tendency to antedate his manuscripts.) To the inexpert eye, it is certain that they were not written so early; but equally, they are not in the strong practised hand of the manuscripts written after the *Decline and Fall* (BL. Add. MS. 34880 is the archive for these questions). In the absence of any *Decline and Fall* MSS., it is hard to date handwriting changes during the years of composition.

[62] *Decline and Fall*, vol. 1, preface; above, p. 371.

the Mahometans, the former under two Emperors, the latter under two Khalifs . . .

Whatever lay beyond the limits of these four Empires was still Pagan, and, excepting China, still barbarous.[63]

No way is found of including the history of China, which is visible only at the moments of Mongol conquest and its reversal;[64] but the world-view of the *Outlines* at one point extends beyond the Sahara into Black Africa,[65] and the 'world' throughout is Eurasian and as much Muslim as Christian. Byzantine history, which its own weak princes and undisciplined populace could never have sustained, is explained by the central position of Constantinople, which,

attracting by its situation and industry the commerce of Europe and Asia, supplied the absolute Monarch with an inexhaustible source of Wealth and Power.[66]

This indeed foreshadows the thesis of Gibbon's last volumes, in which Byzantium is the inert centre to which Arab, Latin and Turkish vitality are successively drawn; and even when the latter receive their due, the crucial points around which the *Outlines* are organised are events in Latin history. Of the eleventh century we read:

The general history of this Age may be comprehended under four Great Events. 1. The Empire of the Turks in Asia. 2. The Disputes between the Emperors and the Popes. 3. The Conquest of England and Naples by the Normans; and 4. The crusades against the Mahometans.[67]

The tale continues through the papal triumph over the Hohenstaufen,[68] the alliance between the church and the Lombard cities,[69] the recovery of liberty and genius sidetracked into the barrenness of scholasticism,[70] and the formation of the French and English monarchies.[71] Humean despotisms arise under Louis XI and Henry VII,[72] but only after

the easy but important conquest of Constantinople was reserved for Mahomet II. The little empire of Trebizond, and the other independent provinces of Greece and Asia Minor, soon experienced the same fate,[73]

scarcely the climactic event which concludes the *Decline and Fall*; and after the Burgundian wars, in which the Swiss role is de-mythologised,

the Low Countries became the inheritance of the House of Austria, and the

[63] *EE*, p. 163. [64] *EE*, pp. 175–6, 187.

[65] *EE*, p. 167 ('the Arabs of Mauritania . . . spread the terror of their arms . . . among the Negroe Nations in the interior of Africa'). [66] *EE*, p. 165. [67] *EE*, pp. 167–8.

[68] *EE*, p. 176. [69] *EE*, p. 171 ('ranged themselves under the Papal Banner').

[70] *EE*, pp. 174–5. [71] *EE*, pp. 178–9, 183–5. [72] *EE*, pp. 191–4. [73] *EE*, p. 189.

subject as well as Theatre, of a long series of Wars, the most celebrated that have ever disturbed Europe . . .[74]

The great successions of the houses of Austria, of Burgundy, of Arragon, and of Castile, were gradually accumulated on the head of Charles the Fifth . . .[75]

and with mention of the Spanish voyages to America and the corruption of the unreformed Church,[76] we reach the end of Gibbon's version of 'the Enlightened narrative'. The hands of his historiographic masters are plainly to be felt, but it is the only version of this narrative he ever wrote. He may have needed it as a preparatory exercise before embarking on the *Decline and Fall* as a whole, or – perhaps a shade more probably – before embarking on the three volumes which took him the long hiatus between 1781 and 1788 to complete; but the difficulty in choosing either the former thesis with Giarrizzo, or the latter with Ghosh, is the same. The Enlightened narrative, conducting us through the Latin middle ages to the birth of modern Europe, is implicit in the *Decline and Fall*, including the project of 1776, but it is never recounted. If the *Outlines of the History of the World* are a preliminary sketch, it is that of a book Gibbon did not write.

It has been studied here because its very uncertainty helps make the point that the writings of the 'dark ages' pursue Gibbon's interests in several directions – towards ancient religion, towards modern Europe – which do not prefigure the content of his first volume and do not much assist us to determine how he took the decisions giving it the form it has. The dark ages remain as dark as ever. There remains, however, one dissertation of this period which is altogether exceptional to this rule; one which not only prefigures the *Decline and Fall*, but actually came to form part of it. This is the *General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West*, written before the accession of Louis XVI in 1774 but printed as an appendage to chapter 38 in 1781,[77] and thus forming the actual conclusion of that part of the work which discharged Gibbon's 'engagement with the Public' by reaching the point indicated by its title.

Readers of the *Decline and Fall* have long found the *General Observations* less than satisfactory. The reasons for this become clearer when we consider their dating; written nearly a decade before the chapters and

[74] *EE*, p. 195. ('Those rude mountaineers were on the contrary the Aggressors.')
[75] *EE*, p. 196. [76] *EE*, pp. 196–7, 197–8.
[77] Womersley, II, pp. 508–16; Bury, IV, pp. 172–81. The essay did not survive in manuscript, and there is no separate edition. It has recently been argued by Womersley (see Ghosh, 1991) that the text as we have it is more the product of a recension about 1780 than we suppose, if we merely subtract those passages obviously later than 1774.

volume they are used to conclude, their language and arguments do not grow naturally out of what precedes them, and the connections between them and the *Decline and Fall* proper, though real, are weak. They are unsatisfactory as rhetoric; they do not conclude the volume strongly enough. This judgment leads to the question of what Gibbon intended, and whether he achieved his intentions, in deciding about 1780 to insert the *General Observations* where he did, instead of allowing his pen to run on to the construction of a new set of reflections at the end of the western empire. It has been argued – very relevantly to the enquiry of this chapter – that the decision is indicative of a radical difficulty, indeed a weakness or flaw, in the structure of the *Decline and Fall* as Gibbon conceived it.[78] Having reached the deposition of Romulus Augustulus by Odoacer, he had completed only the first of the three periods outlined in the 1776 preface. Three and a quarter centuries separated him from the end of the second, the imperial coronation of Charlemagne; the age of Justinian was before him, and he had not yet decided how to deal with it. Therefore – the argument may run – he was unable to supply his readers with a summation of what he had done that would lead to an indication of what he would attempt next, and resorted to the essentially backward-looking *General Observations* as a stopgap. This may well be, but implies a deeper hesitation. Justinian, destroying the Gothic kingdom of Italy, prepared the way for the rise of the papacy as an independent territorial force, and its progressive alliance with the Frankish kingdom in Gaul provided the history of the second period, defined by the polar figures of Justinian and Charlemagne. Gibbon, however, moving into this history from the broad terrain of city, empire and church, was dissatisfied by this perspective. The reign of Justinian led in many directions as well as that pointing westward; there was the history of Constantinopolitan empire, its ecclesiastics and its provinces, and not far ahead the huge subject of Islam and the Arab conquests, by which he was the more fascinated because he did not quite know how to deal with it.[79] The 1776 preface presents the second period as an almost Pirennean duality of Muhammad and Charlemagne, and its account of the third and longest period already declares its author's intention of

[78] Ghosh, 1991, continuing his argument of 1983.
[79] I think Ghosh overstates the case when he writes (1983, p. 19) that 'There was no real link between Gibbon's ecclesiastical and his secular studies . . . As late as 1771–2 there was a fundamental incoherence in Gibbon's plan of study.' Links between secular and ecclesiastical history were more numerous and complex than the rise of the papacy alone could supply. It may, however – here I think I agree with Dr Ghosh – have been well after 1771–2 that they began to arrange themselves in his mind.

taking a Byzantine rather than a Latin route through the centuries of barbarism and religion. It is small wonder that Gibbon in 1780–1 found this prospect daunting, and perfectly arguable that it faced him with challenges he could not always meet; this may explain why he had resort to the *General Observations*. He could only have avoided these difficulties, however, if he had broken off his history in 476 – as he explicitly contemplated doing – or if he had gone on to reiterate the Enlightened narrative of the Latin middle ages and Franco-British modernity. We can see, as early as 1776, that this possibility was before him, but that – for reasons less explicit – he was not going to pursue it.

We are led to these reflections by reading the *General Observations* as they were published, and first read by anyone except Gibbon himself: as part of the text of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Once we accept, however, that they were written before the construction of that text began in about 1774,[80] it becomes theoretically possible to read them as they may have been written, as one of a set of dissertations surviving from 'Gibbon's dark ages'. There is the major practical difficulty that we do not possess them in manuscript, and consequently do not know what revisions Gibbon may have made other than those which indicate their dating. If we venture the assumption that what was printed other than these revisions is broadly what was written about 1772–4, we shall read it as importantly different from the other 'dark ages' essays, in that it does envisage and offer to account for the Decline and Fall itself, and is therefore proleptic of the text in which it came to be included. Here (it may be) is Gibbon thinking about the Decline and Fall before he began to write its history.

The account given relies of course on Montesquieu,[81] but equally on Machiavelli and humanist literature in general. It describes the collapse of a Polybian balance, and the civic virtue it made possible, under the weight of the empire that virtue had acquired. The statement that immoderate size is the simple explanation of Decline and Fall[82] has to be read as meaning that it was the extent of empire that led to the decay of Roman citizenship, the professionalisation of the legions, and the ultimate decay of their military virtue; only after which were the European

[80] They existed before the accession of Louis XVI in 1774, since disrespectful references to Louis XV had to be revised in order to make clear that they did not apply to his successor. *Memoirs*, pp. 163, 175; Ghosh, 1991, pp. 133–5.

[81] This raises the issue, hypothesised by Giarrizzo in 1954 and Womersley in 1988, of Gibbon's supposed movement away from a Montesquieuan position as his powers as a historian developed. This book, assuming the priority of narrative, eschews that interpretation.

[82] Womersley, II, p. 509; Bury, IV, p. 173.

and Asian frontiers of empire more extensive than could be defended. The trouble with this explanation, as Gibbon knew, was that it remained operative for about a thousand years; the general law was unequal to the complexities of narrative. The *General Observations* move on to assert that there can be no objection to the proposition that the rise of the Christian religion was in some way connected with the decay of empire.[83] We are thus informed that Gibbon was at this early date – assuming the sentence to belong to it – concerned with this problem and adopting a defensive tone about it. The *Observations* proceed, however, to say that though the new religion may be censured for replacing civic by cloistered virtue, and converting into useless monks what might have been a reserve of valuable soldiers and artisans, civil society was already in such decay that there would have been flight from it in some other direction had monasticism not been available; a simple causal connection between religion and decline is not to be offered, and since Christianity played some part in civilising the barbarians – the very thing for which a true *philosophe* could not forgive it – there is a counter-connection between religion and civil society itself.

The essay proceeds to depict the endpoint of the Enlightened narrative: the European republic of independent states, connected by commerce, manners and philosophy and moderating by emulation and exchange their very different forms of government.[84] No macronarrative is offered to take us from the fall of Rome to this point, and the Enlightened narrative is therefore assumed rather than prefigured. There is a subtext in which the European republic is depicted as superior to universal monarchies and empires ancient or modern, but in the *General Observations* this is subordinated to another question: whether Europe needs to fear another invasion of barbarians from the Eurasian steppe, such as those occurring from the Huns to the Mongols. In the series of texts constituting the *Decline and Fall*, this is a legitimate literary exercise; the collapse of Rome before barbarian invasion has been described, and we may ask if it will recur. In 1772–4 it is another matter, and we ask why Gibbon carried on the exercise then. We might, if there were textual warrant, suppose him interested in Voltaire's angry response to Rousseau's prediction that Petrine Russia would some day disintegrate and the 'Tartars' return to Europe.[85] The terrifying rebellion of Emelyan Pugachev in 1773–4 made this seem something of a

[83] Womersley, II, p. 510; Bury, IV, p. 175.

[84] Womersley, II, p. 511; Bury, IV, p. 176.

[85] Above, p. 82.

possibility;[86] but the dating is rather late for the composition of the *General Observations*. Gibbon has recourse to Voltaire's assurance that the Russian and Chinese empires are reducing the steppe to cultivation and industry, bringing an end to nomad history. He also maintains that the diversity and extent of western cultures, from Russia to the Americas, enlarge the European republic into something capable of absorbing any barbarians it could not defeat;[87] and goes on to the thesis that any collapse of civilisation would encounter improvements, carried out at peasant level, which could never be lost, so that progress of this minimal kind must survive any cataclysm.[88] These arguments recall those on which the reviewer in the *Mémoires littéraires* had rejected Ferguson's civil apocalypse, but they apply only in Europe, where pasture and tillage interact and neither shepherds nor savages can monopolise the scene. In 1781 they formed an acceptable prelude to any account of western feudal society Gibbon might have begun to provide; what was intended or achieved in 1772–4 is another question. Unless Rousseau and Pugachev were compelling a return to philosophic history, the *General Observations* may have been a rhetorical exercise.

[86] Venturi, 1979, III, pp. 154–66; 1989 (trans. Litchfield), pp. the same.
[87] Womersley, II, pp. 512, 513–14; Bury, IV, pp. 177–8.
[88] Womersley, II, pp. 515–16; Bury, IV, pp. 179–81.

CHAPTER 27

Construction of a narrative: the evidence of the Memoirs

This book has come to take narrative as its centre, meaning by that term the macronarrative of systemic change rather than the classical narrative of exemplary or arcane actions; and within that structure, the formation of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* has taken the shape of movement away from two separate narratives towards something far more complex. One point of departure is the history of the city of Rome, either situated in the antiquarian study of roads and provinces constituting the 'Recueil géographique' (or *Nomina gentesque)* carried to Rome in 1764, or remembered in the *Memoirs* as suggested in an imaginative moment on the Capitol, when a hint given by reading Rutilius Namatianus became the inspiration of writing the decline and fall of the city as deserted by its own empire. The other has been presented as 'the Enlightened narrative', shaped in a series of major works from Giannone's to Robertson's, all of which became known to Gibbon between 1758 and 1767. He was not more committed to it than was implicit in the drafts for the Swiss history and – at whatever date – the *Outlines of the History of the World*, but it is a constant presence in his thought and writing. He came to take decisions whereby the history of the city became, first, a history of the empire whose decline as well as whose growth had led to the abandonment of the city and the ruin of its buildings; second, a history of the church which had replaced the empire and seated itself among the ruins of Rome as a form of spiritual government dominating the Latin west. It was here that Gibbon came in contact with the 'Enlightened narrative', essentially a history of how church had replaced empire until the monarchies of France and England had restored the primacy of civil society. In yet another decision, however, he resolved not to write this history of the Latin west, but to pursue that of the Greek-speaking empire to its extinction in 1453; Decline and Fall thus became less that of the Augustan principate than that of the Constantinean monarchy.

These decisions had been taken – if their full import was not yet known to Gibbon himself – by 1776, when they appear in the preface introducing a series of volumes, but the narrative in the volume first published reaches only to the accession of Constantine, not to the foundation of the Christian monarchy whose history will be the theme of the volumes that follow. It is worth recalling that in this preface Gibbon foresees that after reaching the fall of Constantinople he will return – as he did – to the history of the city, not in the decline of empire but during the 'Christian millennium' ('the darkness and confusion of the middle ages'). By 1776, then, some very complex decisions have been taken and remain to be worked out in execution. The surviving documentation of the 'dark ages' since 1765 has been found to tell us little about the processes by which they were shaped. Gibbon ceased to keep a journal; he did not confide in his correspondents; no manuscripts are known to survive of the *Decline and Fall*'s chapters, whether in draft or as sent to the printer. With the exception of the *General Reflections on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West* – the manuscript has suffered the fate of the chapters of one of which it became part – the dissertations written in these years show Gibbon's continuing interest in history modern in the Latin and Enlightened sense, or ancient in the pagan and oriental. They do not illustrate the shaping of the *Decline and Fall* around the decisions announced in 1776.

We are left with the volume of 1776, with the foreknowledge of its successors, and with the retrospect supplied by Gibbon's memoirs. These unfinished draft autobiographies were written after completion of the *Decline and Fall*, in circumstances including the reception of that work and the contemporary event of the French Revolution, to which Gibbon was as bitterly opposed as his critics, but for which he was beginning to be blamed as one of the *philosophes* who had subverted Christianity. It is possible – whatever we think of his intentions regarding religion – to read the *Memoirs* as designed to present himself in a light of his own choosing, which may not accurately represent his intentions of fifteen years before. It need not follow, however, that they are a unified work of art, to be read simply as conveying the set of intentions with which it was executed. They consist of six unfinished drafts; and it is a premise of historical study that authors write into documents both more and less than they intended, so that both what they say and what they do not say may be scrutinised in search of further information. The *Memoirs* are to be read with caution, but to be read.

It will be found that Gibbon in these writings does not tell us very much about the decisions which issued in the project of 1776, other than that what began as a history of the city grew into a history of the empire; but that he has a good deal to say about the construction of a narrative and the construction of a style. Style is the key to narrative, and macronarrative the key to how the three constituents, narrative, erudition and philosophy, came together; a history of the formation, as well as the operation, of Gibbon's narrative style will, if we ever have it, be a major contribution to our understanding of him. The more limited purposes of this chapter are served by noting that the *Memoirs* describe the construction of both narrative and style as having been difficult.

Erudition must in a certain sense be placed first. Writing must follow after reading, and there is a passage from the *Memoirs* in which Gibbon offers to tell us what he read in framing the *Decline and Fall*. It must be read with the more caution since even Gibbon could not have packed all this into the single year in which he purports to place it.

> As soon as I was released from the fruitless task of the Swiss revolutions, I more seriously undertook (1768) to methodize the form, and to collect the substance, of my Roman decay, of whose limits and extent I had yet a very inadequate notion. The Classics as low as Tacitus, the younger Pliny and Juvenal were my old and familiar companions: I insensibly plunged into the Ocean of the Augustan histories, and in the descending series I investigated, with my pen almost always in my hand, the original records, both Greek and Latin, from Dion Cassius to Ammianus Marcellinus, from the reign of Trajan to the last age of the western Caesars. The subsidiary rays of Medals and inscriptions, of Geography and Chronology, were thrown upon their proper objects; and I applied the collections of Tillemont, whose inimitable accuracy almost assumes the character of Genius, to fix and arrange within my reach the loose and scattered atoms of historical information. Through the darkness of the middle ages I explored my way in the Annals and Antiquities of Italy of the learned Muratori; and diligently compared them with the parallel or transverse lines of Sigonius and Maffei, Baronius and Pagi, till I almost grasped the ruins of Rome in the fourteenth Century, without suspecting that this final chapter must be attained by the labour of six quartos and twenty years,[89]

that is, 1768 to 1788. It is a long stride from Ammianus to Muratori, and in bridging the gap with Tillemont, Gibbon does not here tell us that he used the great Jansenist as his guide to the history of the Fathers, the councils and the heresies. The ecclesiastical, philosophical and above all Greek history contained in the volumes of 1781 is invisible, but Gibbon recalls looking ahead to medieval Italy, the struggles of empire and

[89] *Memoirs*, pp. 146–7.

papacy, and the history of the ruins of Rome, all of which he wrote about in the 1788 series as he had forecast in 1776 and earlier, but only after rendering them formally marginal to his history of the eastern empire. The ruins of Old Rome, as they appeared to Rutilius and to Poggio Bracciolini a thousand years later, are mentioned to the exclusion of Constantine's New Rome, of which Gibbon wrote a detailed and imagined description, but which he never saw. His readers might travel to the Capitol as he had done, but it was not given to them to sit musing on the Golden Horn while the muezzins were calling the faithful to prayer across the dome of Hagia Sophia. Gibbon in the *Decline and Fall* had made that journey in imagination, but in the *Memoirs* he is thinking of a readership whose minds had never left the Latin west and who might have found difficulty in reading his later volumes until they returned, as he does here, to scenes familiar to the neo-classical Enlightened vision.

The *Memoirs* say little about the history of the church and the eastern empire, the chapters on Byzantine and Arab history, the excursions into Mongolian, Chinese, Ethiopian and Turkish history, which are of such bulk in the *Decline and Fall* as completed. The first of these themes, indeed, Gibbon may have intended to play down. The *Memoirs* further say:

> As I believed, and as I still believe, that the propagation of the Gospel and triumph of the Church are inseparably connected with the decline of the Roman Monarchy, I weighed the causes and effects of the Revolution; and contrasted the narrative and apologies of the Christians themselves with the glances of candour or enmity which the Pagans have cast on the rising sect. The Jewish and Heathen testimonies as they are collected and illustrated by Dr Lardner directed, without superseding my search of the originals; and in an ample dissertation on the miraculous darkness of the passion I privately drew my conclusions from the silence of an unbelieving age.[90]

Gibbon was recalling his fifteenth and sixteenth chapters and their angry reception, as after 1789–90 he had renewed reason to do, and the *Memoirs* have more to say on the subject. But of the second and third volumes, which cover the period from Constantine to Theodosius, they remark:

> My Ecclesiastical history still breathed the same spirit of freedom; but Protestant zeal is more indifferent to the characters and controversies of the fourth and fifth Centuries; my obstinate silence had damped the ardour of the polemics . . . and my impartial balance of the virtues and vices of Julian was

[90] *Memoirs*, p. 147.

> generally praised . . . But I perceived, and without surprize, the coldness and even prejudice of the town: nor could a whisper escape my ear that, in the judgement of many readers, my continuation was much inferior to the original attempt . . . The public is seldom wrong; and I am inclined to believe, that especially in the beginning, [these volumes] are more prolix and less entertaining than the first: my efforts had not been relaxed by success and I had rather deviated into the opposite fault of minute and superfluous diligence.[91]

The passage concludes with a self-criticism on grounds of style; but Gibbon may or may not be reliable when suggesting either that the 1781 volumes occasioned less scandal than the first, or that they were of less interest to a public acquainted with classical but not with late antiquity – as might be true of his lay but not of his clerical readers. It has been argued, however, and may be again, that the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the 1776 volume – though their intention and their reception deserve all the attention which they have received – are not crucial to the structure of the *Decline and Fall*; they precede, rather than anticipate, the history of the ancient church and its Councils, the collisions between imperial and doctrinal authority, and the advent of Islam as a devastating if partial closure to the whole story, which give the central volumes, II, III and IV–V, their force and meaning. If this is so, Gibbon was downplaying these later themes in the *Memoirs*, as we have seen that the project of 1776 does little to anticipate the history of the church. It will follow that there is no key to the development of the *Decline and Fall* but the text of the *Decline and Fall* itself; the secondary documents do not offer it.

So much for macronarrative. Concerning style, the autobiographies have this to say:

> The style of an author should be the image of his mind: but the choice and command of language is the fruit of exercise: many experiments were made before I could hit the middle tone between a dull Chronicle and a Rhetorical declamation; three times did I compose the first chapter, and twice the second and third, before I was tolerably satisfied with their effect.[92]

The message here is that a non-narrative style was the harder to achieve; the first three chapters give us the *peinture* of the Antonine empire at its height, preceding the *récit* of its decline and fall.

> In the remainder of the way I advanced with a more equal and easy pace: but the fifteenth and sixteenth Chapters have been reduced by three successive revisions from a large Volume to their present size; and they might still be compressed without any loss of facts or sentiments. An opposite fault may be

[91] *Memoirs*, pp. 162–3. [92] *Memoirs*, p. 155.

imputed to the concise and superficial narrative of the first reigns from Commodus to Alexander, a fault of which I have never heard except from Mr Hume in his last journey to London.[93]

Here Gibbon is writing primarily of the most controversial of his chapters, those which introduce the theme of Christianity; and if we accept what he here says, he may be telling us that he was slow to realise how great a part their subject would play, and how many difficulties they would create, in the progress of his work. The experience he describes is one through which most historians have passed, and whatever the intentions with which he recounts it, they may be inclined to believe him. If the *peinture* of primitive Christianity was hard to render concise, the *récit* based on the *Historia Augusta* was all too easy, and Gibbon is intrigued, as we may be, by the recollection that it was Hume who told him of it. The issue presented is that of forming a style which should bring together *récit* and *peinture*, narrative, philosophy and erudition; it was the information the two latter fed into the former that created the macronarrative of systemic transformation, and the problem before the creator of a style was that of conducting the grand narrative. In turning away from modernity, first towards classical and then towards ecclesiastical antiquity, Gibbon exposed himself to the two richest sources of erudition then existing; and perhaps it was this, rather than any literary or philosophical decision, that obliged him to marry erudition to other modes of historiography on a scale otherwise unequalled among the Enlightened historians. If we match what the *Memoirs* say of his compositional difficulties against the growing text of his first volume, we see that as he obtained some mastery over his style, things of extraordinary richness and diversity began to happen. They happened in consequence of the complexity of the task he was beginning to set himself: that of constructing an Enlightened narrative of an age doubly preceding 'the Enlightened narrative' written by others; preceding both Enlightened modernity and the age of ecclesiastical supremacy in the Latin provinces which was its antithesis. As an Enlightened historian of late antiquity and its Byzantine and Islamic sequels – the world he had discovered reading ecclesiastical historians at Stourhead – Gibbon embarked on a project which only clerical historians had attempted, or would attempt until far into the next century.[94] He found difficulty in explaining this project to others, even perhaps to himself; and it has left him a very great figure, but one very selectively read.

[93] *Memoirs*, p. 156. [94] Forbes, 1952.

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Index

Académie des inscriptions et belles lettres, 5, 23, 114, 158, 379, 386
Act of Toleration, 167
Act of Union, 163, 179, 274, 301
Addison, Joseph, 169
Albert of Brandenburg, 295
Albigensians, 57
Alexander of Macedon, 77, 85
Alexander III, Pope, 125
Alexander VI, Pope, 133, 134, 286
Alfred of Wessex, King, 124, 242–3, 260
Allestree, Richard, 188
anabaptism, 140–1, 196, 298
ancient constitution, 40, 52, 168, 204, 206, 240, 242, 245–46, 248, 252, 255, 259–60
ancients, 14, 53
  ancients and moderns, controversy between, 22, 91, 169
Angevins, 32, 39, 58, 243, 248
Anne, Queen of England, 167, 173, 277
Anquetil-Duperron, Abraham-Hyacinthe, 112
anthropology, 13
Aquinas, Thomas, 58, 230
  Thomists, 151
arcana (see also historiography, Tacitean), 9, 11, 23–4, 81, 159, 184, 201, 206, 217, 218, 219, 243, 256, 259, 292, 304, 397
archaeology, 15–17; *see also* erudition
Ariosto, Lodovico, 131
Aristotle, 53, 85
  Aristotelianism, 59
Arius, 95, 142
  Arianism, 218
Arminius, 213, 297
  Arminianism, 94–5, 151
Arnauld, Antoine, 95, 134, 383
Astell, Mary, 181
Athanasius, 95
Augustus, emperor, 11, 44, 85, 187, 291, 353, 376
Aurelius, Marcus, 122
Austen, Jane, 234
authority, 16, 20
  civil, 11, 12, 29
  religious, 15, 29
Averroism, 59

Bacon, Francis, 19, 159, 170, 202, 222, 264, 327
barbarians, 35, 341
  Avars, 117
  Goths, 34, 44, 124, 323, 375
  Huns, 115, 117, 124, 155, 317, 323, 395
  Lombards, 34, 38, 44, 45
  Mongols, 115, 117, 124, 155, 323
  Saracens, 375
  Tartars, 124, 323, 339, 341
  Turkic, 117, 155
  Vandals, 124, 323, 375
barbarism, 124, 132, 155, 242, 247, 279, 332, 338, 353, 354, 361
  'barbarism and religion', 2, 243, 252–3, 258, 280, 310, 316
Barbeyrac, Jean, 69
Bargaeus, Pietro, 380
Baronius, Cardinal, 54, 399
Baudouin, François, 60
Bayle, Pierre, 96, 101, 157
Beausobre, Isaac de, 384, 387, 388
Becket, Thomas, 211, 229, 243–4, 246, 252
Bedford, regent, 224
Berlin, Isaiah, 23
Bernini, Gian Lorenzo, 139
Blair, Hugh, 268, 269
Blois, Countess of, 249
Bodin, Jean, 62
Boethius, Hector, 262
Bolingbroke, Viscount, 104, 120, 145, 149, 172, 184, 186, 191, 276, 388
  Dissertation on Parties, 172, 191
  Letters on the Study of History, 172, 276
  Remarks on the History of England, 172
Boniface VIII, Pope, 59, 128

Boswell, James, 311
Bothwell, James Hepburn, earl of, 233, 272
Bougainville, Jean-Pierre de, 386
Bracciolini, Poggio, 400
Brady, Robert, 16, 247
Brucker, Johann Jakob, 19
Bruno, Giordano, 63, 68
Buchanan, George, 235, 261, 262, 263–5, 268, 272
Buddha, 114
  Buddhism, 108
Buffon, Comte de, 112
Burke, Edmund, 112, 165, 175, 192, 232, 284
  Reflections on the Revolution in France, 192
Burnet, Gilbert, 236

Cadell, Thomas, 373
Caesar, Julius, 38, 43, 85, 243, 344
Calvin, John, 139, 141, 236, 296, 297, 298
  Calvinism, 93–5, 297, 302, 312, 370
Camden, William, 222, 237
Campanella, Tommaso, 63, 68
Carlyle, Alexander, 268, 269
Carte, Thomas, 243
Catherine II, tsarina, 110, 155
Catherine of Aragon, 225
Caylus, comte de, 386
ch'i, 68
Charlemagne, emperor, 2, 47, 75, 87, 103, 104, 106, 108, 120–1, 123, 128, 153, 370, 374, 376, 378, 379, 393
Charles I, king of England, 126, 166, 203, 206–7, 213, 216, 231, 274
Charles II, king of England, 149, 218
Charles II, king of Spain, 42, 64
Charles V, emperor, 2, 61, 137, 138, 148, 275, 276–7, 280, 285–6, 288, 289–99, 370, 379
Charles VI, emperor, 30, 61, 64
Charles VII, king of France, 60, 285
Charles VIII, king of France, 70, 137, 224
Charles XII, king of Sweden, 75, 76, 78
Charles of Anjou, 58, 127
Charles the Bold, 385
Charlevoix, Pierre-François-Xavier, 323, 336
Chatelet, Emilie du, 79, 102–3, 105, 108, 114, 120–1, 182, 185, 202
Chillingworth, William, 21
China, 3, 40, 74, 79, 80, 98–119, 151, 157, 189, 196, 232
Christ, 38, 68, 108, 122, 142, 143, 144, 211, 231
Christendom, 38, 73, 120, 146, 153, 194, 310
'Christian Millennium', 2, 3, 13, 20, 24, 92, 252–3, 257, 278, 280, 299, 302, 305, 370, 371
Christianity, 194, 232, 237, 291, 293, 294
Chrysoloras, 60
Chukchi, 343
church
  Anglican, 32, 213, 218, 232, 274
  Greek Orthodox, 53
  medieval, 15
  papal, 4, 29, 53, 296
  patristic, 4, 29
  primitive, 29, 294
  Protestant, 296
  Scottish, 270
Cicero, 15, 85, 210
  de Officiis, 188
citizenship, 10, 43
civil society, 12, 20, 21, 29, 65–6, 164–5, 246, 267, 283, 284, 304, 310, 321
Clarendon, Edward Hyde, Earl of, 90, 149, 168, 172, 184
  History of the Rebellion, 166
Clovis, king of the Franks, 124
Coke, Sir Edward, 254
Colbert, Jean Baptiste, 165
Colden, Cadwallader, 336
Collier, Jeremy, 232
Collins, Anthony, 145
commercial society, 2, 169, 189, 197, 265, 280, 329
  and manners, 19–20
  le doux commerce, 149
Condé, prince de, 87, 88
Confucius, 127, 196
Constantine, emperor, 2, 38, 44, 47, 81, 95, 354, 370, 376, 378, 379, 400
Constantinople, 36, 38, 42, 44, 79
Constantius, 44
constitution of the United States of America, 218–19
contingency, 9, 11, 39–40, 42–3
Cornelio, Tommaso, 63
corruption, 10, 242, 331, 347, 351; *see also* virtue and narrative, classical
Council of Lyons, 57
Council of Trent, 12, 61, 146, 235, 290, 292, 297
Counter-Reformation, 61, 146, 211, 235
Covenanters, 273, 303
Craddock, Patricia, 382, 389
credit, public, 169, 187, 221
Cranmer, Thomas, archbishop, 296
Cromwell, Oliver, 149, 217, 231, 244, 257
Crusades, 47, 59, 281, 282
Cudworth, Ralph, 388
Cujas, Jacques, 60, 63

d'Alembert, Jean le Rond, 6, 14, 23–4, 74, 75, 84, 90, 163, 182, 195, 300, 327, 329
Sur la destruction des Jesuites, 300
d'Andrea, Francesco, 63
D'Ewes, Sir Simonds, 238
d'Herbelot, Barthelemy, 379, 387
Dangeau, Marquis de, 185
Daniel, Gabriel, 171
Dante, 57, 58
Davies, Sir John, 216, 235
De tribus impostoribus, 57, 108
Defoe, Daniel, 170, 171
deism, 13, 19, 68–9, 143, 144, 145, 151, 196, 230, 271
Demosthenes, 85
Descartes, René, 63
despotism, 344, 348, 350–1, 356
Deyverdun, Georges, 173, 352, 383, 384
Diderot, Denis, 69, 102, 144, 163, 304
Diocletian, emperor, 44
Dion Cassius, 399
Dominicans, 99
Dryden, John, 165
Duck, Arthur, 35, 66
Dunstan, Saint, archbishop, 245

east, concept of, 29, 142, 3 52
Echard, Laurence, 29, 33
Edict of Caracalla, 43
Edict of Nantes, 90, 96
Edward I, king of England, 248
Edward III, king of England, 248
Edward VI, king of England, 143, 234
Elizabeth I, queen of England, 202–3, 204, 222, 233, 234, 236, 237, 238, 240, 272, 297
Encyclopédie, 129, 185
England, 33, 151, 167, 259
English civil war, 16
Enlightenment, 7, 17, 19, 24–5, 41, 76, 84, 96, 134, 141, 146, 147, 150, 154, 159, 169, 170, 189, 210, 218, 257, 260, 265, 266, 275, 302, 353, 360, 370
  Arminian, 213, 272, 299, 312
  Cartesian, 30
  Neapolitan, 30, 63
  Newtonian, 30
  Parisian, 151
  Protestant, 151, 154
  Scottish, 176, 266, 270, 303, 312, 315, 326, 358
  St. Andrews, 306
The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 4, 5
enthusiasm, 94, 134, 135, 140, 142, 145, 151, 167, 192, 195, 207–40, 244, 246, 249, 257, 270, 283, 298, 370
Epicureanism, 57, 100
erudition, 5, 6, 12, 13, 16, 21, 70–2, 157, 158, 159, 182–3, 189, 278, 399, 402
  and archaeology, 14
  and imagination, 23, 157
  and antiquity, 14–15
etymology, 14
Eugene, Prince, 68
Europe
  as commercial system, 20
  as enlightened, 3, 24
  Christian, 29
  concept of, 2, 20, 65–6, 73, 78–80, 154, 156, 225, 259, 278–9, 280, 281, 284, 286–87, 289–99, 310, 328, 342, 356, 369
  Latin, 3, 39, 83, 154
  Eurocentrism, 3, 108, 117, 154
  see also Christendom
Eusebius of Caesarea, 11, 142
exemplarity, 8–9, 397; *see also* narrative, classical

Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh, 254, 330
Ferdinand I, 271, 297
Ferdinand the Catholic, king of Spain, 61
Fergus of Dalriada, 264
Fergus mac Erc, 262
Fergus mac Ferquhard, 262
Ferguson, Adam, 266, 268, 269, 300, 302, 315, 330–57, 358, 360, 361, 383, 396
  Essay on the History of Civil Society, 153, 304, 330–45, 346, 352
feudalism, 16, 247, 251, 280, 327, 344, 386
Fletcher, Andrew, 170, 264, 269
footnotes, 158, 186, 278, 387
Forbes, Duncan, 259
Fortescue, Sir John, 254
fortune, *see* contingency
Fox, George, 218
Francis I, 291–93
Franklin, Benjamin, 196
Frederick II, emperor, 39, 56–8, 70, 78, 384
Frederick Barbarossa, emperor, 56, 59, 70
Frederick Henry, prince of Orange, 149
Fréret, Nicolas, 101, 386

Gallicanism, 31, 151
Gardiner, Bishop, 234
Gassendi, Pierre, 63
genealogy, Noachic, 13, 112
George II, king of England, 255–8
George III, king of England, 191, 206, 276
Ghosh, P.R., 389–90, 392
Giannone, Pietro, 18, 29–71, 123, 125, 154, 310, 369, 374, 375, 376, 390, 397

imprisonment, 38
influence on Gibbon, 40
Apologia de' teologi scholastici, 69
Istoria Civile, 29–71, 123
Triregno, 38, 40, 69, 71
Giarrizzo, Giuseppe, 389, 392
Gibbon, Edward
and Buffon, 362
and Christianity, 69, 293, 355, 377–78, 389, 398, 402
and d'Alembert, 6, 23–4, 169–70
and de Guignes, 114
and enlightened narrative, 371, 392
and enthusiasm, 45
and family, 145, 167, 173, 181
and Ferguson, 311, 352
and Germany, 3
and Giannone, 30
and Hume, 163, 174, 177, 193, 309, 317, 371
and Luther, 296
and Middleton, 295
and Millar, 311
and modernity, 3–4, 301, 371, 402
and Parsons, 357
and Robertson, 163, 174, 302–3, 309, 314, 317, 371
and Rousseau, 91
and savagery, 356
and Smith, 309, 311–12, 319
and stadial theory, 316
and *Triregno*, 69
and Voltaire, 72, 75, 94, 153, 156, 371
at *Les Delices*, 72
at Stourhead, 31, 378, 402
childhood, 4, 18, 29, 31, 293, 311
compared to Giannone, 67–8, 70
'Dark Ages', 381–96
in Lausanne, 4, 18, 30, 31, 72, 163, 371, 373
in Paris, 163, 371
in Parliament, 164
in Rome, 4, 18, 163, 3 71
on antiquity and modernity, 46, 120
on Chillingworth, 21
on fall of Constantinople, 60, 303
on Pope Gregory II, 46
on the Guelfs, 67
Critical Observations on the Sixth Book of the Aeneid, 387–89
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, 1, 3, 4, 6, 66, 69–71, 74–5, 94, 114, 163, 175, 197, 257, 300, 303, 309–11, 312, 327, 355, 356, 364–5, 369–402
Digression on the Character of Brutus, 387
Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature, 5, 18, 21, 69, 157, 159, 185, 352
General Observations on the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West, 392–6, 398
Memoirs, 31, 309, 371, 374, 375, 378, 389, 397–402
Memoires Littéraires de la Grande Bretagne, 173, 175, 177, 352, 357, 361, 383, 396
Mémoire sur la monarchie des Mèdes, 386–7
Outlines of the History of the World, 389, 390, 392, 397
Giovio, Paolo, 291
Glasgow university, 311, 312, 319
Goguet, Antoine-Yves, 316
De l'origine des lois, des arts et des sciences, 316
Gomarists, 151
Gregory II, pope, 45, 123
Gregory VII, pope, 48–50, 125, 128, 243, 286–87
Grotius, Hugo, 19
Guelfs, 71, 384
Guicciardini, Francesco, 61, 149, 225, 289
Guignes, Joseph de, 74, 114–5, 116, 155, 386
  on Chinese history, 116
  Histoire des Huns, Turcs et Mongols, 74, 114, 344, 356
Guiscard, Robert, 48
Gustavus Adolphus, 149

Habsburgs, 30
Hale, Sir Matthew, 254
Hampden, John, 212
Hamilton, Alexander, 220
Harley, Robert, earl of Oxford, 166
Harrington, James, 16, 170, 202, 204, 206, 220–21, 264, 328
  Oceana, 206
Harrison, William, 217
Harvey, William, 141
Henry I, king of England, 244
Henry II, king of England, 243, 245, 297
Henry III, king of England, 246
Henry IV, emperor, 287
Henry IV, king of France, 125–6, 149
Henry VI, king of England, 254
Henry VII, king of England, 170, 199, 202–3, 205, 222, 224, 231, 264, 271, 391
Henry VIII, King of England, 93, 139, 222, 225, 228, 229, 230–1, 232, 238, 264, 294
Herbert of Cherbury, Lord, 222, 230
Heylyn, Peter, 38, 232, 236
Hicks, Philip, 171, 172
historian
  as actor, 8
  as political theorist, 9
  as witness, 8

historian (*cont.*)
Christian, 11, 402
see also historiography, history
historicism, 7, 23, 176
historiography
ancient, 5, 10, 11, 15
and erudition, 14
and state, 2, 7
baroque, 12
Christian, 11, 13
early modern, 6, 7–25
enlightened, 2, 23–4, 266, 310
European, 17
history of, 7
modern, 5, 15, 278
Tacitean, 10, 12, 24–5, 258, 291–92
Rankean, 137
Scottish, 125
see also historian, history
history
ancient, 10
as genre, 7–8
civil, 11–12, 23–4, 34, 37, 44, 166
classical, 8
conjectural, 304, 309–318, 330–45, 346
cultural, 14
cyclical view of, 282
diachronic, 17
ecclesiastical, 11–12, 37, 168
'kings-and-battles', 75
metahistory, 22, 121
natural, 23–4
philosophical, 5, 13, 15, 17, 40, 154, 171, 195, 219, 231, 259, 271, 277, 278, 299, 304, 319–29, 364
sacred, 11–13
synchronic, 17 *see also* context
universal, 34
whig, 168, 261, 262
Hobbes, Thomas, 19, 53, 126, 333
Homer, 131, 337
Horace, 85, 187
Hotman, François, 60
Howel, William, 29, 38, 374
Hsiung-nu, 115, 117
Huguenots, 90, 93, 96
humanism, 15
human nature, 22
Hume, David, 6, 24, 25, 40, 141, 145, 149, 154, 157, 163–257, 258–9, 265, 266, 268, 269, 270, 273, 275, 280, 281, 282, 293, 294, 297, 300, 310, 315, 317, 323, 329, 330, 331, 338, 343, 345, 346, 349, 364, 371, 375, 376, 377, 382, 384, 389, 390, 402
and oriental despotism, 239
and Smith, 202
at La Flèche, 178
influence on Gibbon, 1
on Gibbon, 191
Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, 177, 195
Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 177, 179
Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, 177, 179, 193
Essays Moral, Political and Literary, 178, 179, 191, 193, 196, 200, 220
History of England, 177, 179, 186, 191, 196, 199–257, 260, 261, 268, 297, 376
History of Great Britain, 199–257, 259
The Natural History of Religion, 179, 193, 194–5, 358
Political Discourses, 179, 196
Treatise on Human Nature, 176, 177, 178, 183, 200
'Character of Sir Robert Walpole,' 186
'Of the Balance of Power,' 197
'Of Parties in General,' 194
'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations,', 196
'Of Public Credit,' 197, 348
'Of Refinement in the Arts,' 197
'Of the Study of History', 180, 183
'Of Superstition and Enthusiasm', 193, 195, 209
'On the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences,' 183, 188,
'That Politics may be Reduced to a Science', 184
Hurd, Richard, 200, 388, 389
Hus, Jan, 251
Hutcheson, Francis, 312

Ignatius Loyola, Saint, 300
Innocent IV, pope, 57
Innocent XI, pope, 92–3
inquisition, 61, 146
Islam, 110
Ivo of Chartres, 52

James, duke of York, 218
James I, king of Scotland, 266, 273
James I and VI, king of Great Britain, 199, 202, 204–5, 208, 211, 213, 214, 231, 242, 262, 271, 273
James II and VII, king of Great Britain, 38, 93, 219, 256
James III, the Old Pretender, 89
James V, king of Scotland, 264, 271
Jansenists, 93–5, 151, 212
Jefferson, Thomas, 220, 226, 227

Jerome of Prague, 251
Jesuits, 61, 74, 80, 93, 95, 97, 99–101, 106–7, 114, 131, 139, 147, 148, 151, 210, 235, 290, 298–9, 303
Jewish people, 136, 147
John of Leyden, 140
Johnson, Samuel, 256, 311
Jones, William, 122
Julian the Apostate, emperor, 44, 56, 122, 383
Jurchen, 117
Jurieu, Pierre, 96
jurisprudence, 22, 42, 52, 54, 56, 58–9, 280, 313, 314–5, 319,
history of, 34
natural, 159, 362
Roman, 255
Justinian, Emperor, 43, 47, 52, 67, 374, 376, 378, 393
Justinian Codes, 44
Juvenal, 3 99

K'ang-hsi, emperor, 79, 101
Kames, Henry Home, Lord, 266
Kant, Immanuel, 23
Kelley, Donald, 16
Kennet, White, 33
Khitai, 115
Kins, 115
Kidd, Colin, 267, 304
Knox, John, 235, 236, 273, 296

La Chaise, Père, 93
La Curne de Sainte-Palaye, 17, 281
Lacedaemonians, 148
Lafitau, Joseph-François, 323, 336
Langton, Stephen, 246
Lapps, 113
Lardner, Nathaniel, 383
Lascaris, 60
Latitudinarians, 230
Laud, William, 214–5, 229
Law, William, 181
law, 39, 34, 241–57, 263
angevin, 32
canon, 66, 284
common, 243, 245, 254
feudal, 47, 55, 59, 243, 245, 261
Gothic, 32, 47
Greek, 32
Lombard, 32, 47, 51, 56
natural, 22
Norman, 32
Roman, 16, 32, 42, 51–2, 55, 59, 60, 66, 254, 282
Saxon, 245, 260
Suabian, 32
see also ancient constitution, jurisprudence, Justinian Codes, Magna Carta, Pandects
Le Tellier, Chancellor, 95
Lecomte, Père, 101
Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, 3 85
Leo the Isaurian, emperor, 45, 47, 123
Leo III, pope, 120
Leo X, pope, 225, 227, 228, 229, 293
Livy, 85, 187, 377
Locke, John, 19, 21, 91, 169, 245, 333
Lollards, 229, 249
Louis XI, king of France, 271, 285, 391
Louis XIV, king of France, 2, 75, 76, 78, 83, 84, 86, 88–90, 95, 96, 97, 111, 112, 118, 121, 128, 137, 150, 170, 219, 289, 291, 299, 303, 310, 353, 370, 379
Louis, Saint, 126–7
Lucretius, 63
Lucretians, 85, 145
Luther, Martin, 139, 146, 211, 228, 291, 293, 294, 296
Lycurgus, 140
Lyttleton, George, Lord, 175, 383
History of the Life of King Henry II, 173

Mabillon, Dom, 22, 170
Macaulay, Catharine, 175, 258, 263
History of England, 175, 258
Macbeth, king of Scotland, 264
Machiavelli, Niccolò, 83, 328, 394
Macpherson, James, 269
Madison, James, 226
Maffei, Scipione, 70, 399
Magna Carta, 244–5, 250, 254
Magyars, 117
Mahomet II, 85, 391
Maintenon, Madame de, 93
Mair, John, 264
Malcolm Canmore, 242, 272
Malcolm II, king of Scotland, 264
Manchus, 115, 117, 316
Marcellinus, Ammianus, 377, 399
Marsham, Sir John, 90
Marsilius of Padua, 43
Mary, queen of Scots, 262, 271–2, 278
Mary I, queen of England, 232–5
Mary of Guise, 233
Maurice, prince of Orange, 148–9, 295
May, Thomas, 166, 173, 300
Mazarin, Cardinal, 88, 92
Medici, Catherine de, 233
Medici, Lorenzo de', 85
Melecsala, sultan of Egypt, 127
Melville, Andrew, 273

middle ages, 4, 192, 303
Latin middle ages, 14–15, 70
Millar, John, 178, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 319, 320, 322, 326, 327, 329, 330, 355, 373
The Origin and Distinction of Ranks, 306, 330
Milton, John, 257
mind
faculties, 25, 157
knowledge of itself, 22, 170, 211
natural history of, 176
socialization of, 21, 363
Mirandola, Pico della, 134–5
modernity, 3, 171, 179, 180, 191, 242, 264–5, 276, 278, 299, 328, 343, 369, 370, 375
moeurs, 16, 19, 29, 72–3, 120–136
Molinists, 151
Momigliano, Arnaldo, 4–5, 18, 261, 364
Momigliano's formula, 5, 6, 7, 18, 23–5, 74, 159, 163, 184–5, 200, 271, 272, 277–78, 289, 309–10, 318, 365, 370, 379, 402
monotheism, 108, 194–5
Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de, 18, 40, 111, 124, 156, 157, 159, 180, 240, 245, 258, 310, 320, 326–7, 328, 331, 344, 356, 376, 394
Considerations sur la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Decadence, 180
Lettres Persanes, 112
Esprit des Lois, 112, 158, 258
Montfort, countess of, 249
Montfort, Simon de, 247
Moses, 108, 151
Muhammad, 108–9, 127
Munzer, Thomas, 140, 298
Muratori, Lodovico, 70, 369, 374, 384–5, 399

Naples, 29–71
narrative, 6, 12, 159, 224, 233, 258–9, 290, 315, 319–29, 376, 390, 397
biblical, 13
classical, 8, 10, 121, 397
enlightened, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 20, 24–5, 65–6, 72–3, 87, 153, 156, 159, 261, 300, 303, 304, 310, 316, 365, 369, 370, 374, 377, 379, 382, 386, 395, 397, 402
of action, 8–9, 208, 216, 241, 278
of context, 9, 278
macronarrative, 5, 6, 17, 19, 24–5, 29, 65–6, 153, 159, 290, 302, 309, 318, 327, 363, 397, 400–1
metanarrative, 290, 363
sacred, 13
Tacitean, 20, 23, 184
Neale, Sir John, 238
neo-Platonism, 383–4
Newman, Cardinal, 11
Newton, Sir Isaac, 19, 91, 159, 327
Normans, 38, 47, 51, 243, 375

O'Brien, Karen, 1, 290
Ockley, Simon, 379, 387
Odoacer, 393
Origen, 142
Osiris, 135
Ossian, 269
Ovid, 85

Pagi, Antoine, 399
Pallavicino, Sforza, 290
Pandects, 44, 54, 56, 282; *see also* law
pantheism, 68
Paris, Matthew, 57
parliament, English, 247–48, 250–1, 256–7, 259
Parsons, James, 357–61, 362
Pascal, Blaise, 134
Peace of Alais, 96
Penn, William, 218
Pericles, 85, 130–1, 347, 349
Peter, Saint, 36, 38, 55, 138
Peter I, 102, 121
Peter de Marca (Pierre de la Marc, archbishop), 62
Peter the Great, tsar, 74–83, 152, 155
Peter the Hermit, 128
Petrarch, 131
Philip II, king of Spain, 62, 81, 148, 275, 297, 304
Philip III, king of Spain, 304
Philip of Hesse, 139
Philip of Macedon, 85
Philip the Fair, king of France, 59, 128
Philippa of Hainault, 251
philology, 15, 60, 158
philosophy, 6, 12, 13, 18, 320
and irenicism, 18–19
as opposed to history, 23–4
as temper of the mind, 19–21
Chinese, 99
enlightened, 19
philosophes, 7, 23–4, 29, 72–3, 154, 155, 156, 158, 230, 267, 310
philosophie, 73, 177
Pilate, Pontius, 11
Piranesi, Giambattista, 139
Pitt, William, the elder, 256, 269
Plato, 85, 91, 142, 144, 358, 383
Platonists, 19, 134, 145
Pliny, 399
Pococke, Edward, 379, 387
Pole, Cardinal, 234

police, 63, 66, 90, 133, 139, 320–1
politeness, 20, 247, 270
Polybius, 11, 377
polytheism, 194
Pomeau, René, 74
Pownall, Thomas, 338
Priestley, Joseph, 91
'public space', 164–9
Pufendorf, Samuel, 77, 278
Pugachev, Emelyan, 395, 396
puritanism, 215, 236
Pym, John, 212
pyrrhonism, 9, 22, 158
Pythagoreans, 19

Quakers, 196, 218
Quietists, 94–5, 141

racial theory, 242, 358
Voltaire and, 112–17, 135
Racine, Jean, 165
Raleigh, Sir Walter, 235
Rancé, Armand Jean le Bouthillier de, 170
Ranum, Orest, 76
Rapin-Thoyras, Paul de, 149, 173, 191
Raynal, Guillaume-Thomas, Abbé, 3, 74, 102, 163, 281
Histoire des Deux Indes, 102, 155, 276, 277, 300, 304
Reformation, 12, 41, 139, 141, 210, 214, 216, 227, 229–31, 291, 292, 294
Renaissance, 210
French, 45
republic, 29, 71, 188, 219
Restoration of 1660, 274
Revolution
Age of, 10, 112
American, 257, 300
French, 232
of 1688, 168, 276, 302, 323
Ricci, Matteo, 98–100, 107
Richard II, king of England, 249
Richelieu, Cardinal, 86–8, 92, 96, 149, 165
Robertson, John, 69, 71
Robertson, William, 2, 40, 156, 158, 168, 175–76, 185, 186, 201, 206, 245, 253, 257, 258–304, 310, 317, 329, 331, 338, 339, 345, 364, 369, 370, 373, 377, 385, 390, 397
influence on Gibbon, 1
History of America, 277, 304, 339
History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V, 274–5, 276, 277, 278, 289–99, 300, 304, 342
History of Scotland, 174, 271–2, 278, 301
The Situation of the World at the Time of Christ's Appearance, 291
View of the Progress of Society in Europe, 153, 277, 278, 280, 288, 302–3, 340
Roger, Count, 54
Roger I, king of Sicily, 48, 58
Roger II, king of Sicily, 39, 48, 54, 58
Rohan, duc de, 276
Rollo of Normandy, 124
Romany people, 135–6
Romulus, 339
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 82, 91, 155, 156, 331, 340, 395, 396
Royal Society, 165
Royal Society of Edinburgh, 314
Rutilius Namatianus, 380, 397, 400

Salians, 47
Sarpi, Paolo, 2, 32, 61, 225, 235, 289
savages, *see* barbarians
Savonarola, 133–5
Schall, Adam, 99
scholasticism, 19, 52, 54, 58, 283
Scotists, 151
Selden, John, 38, 39, 256
Servetus, Michael, 141–3, 145
Shaftesbury, Earl of, 150, 169, 181, 218
Shakespeare, William, 131
Sher, Richard B., 270
Sidney, Algernon, 259
Sigonio, Carlo, 399
Simson, John, 312
Sixtus V, pope, 146
Smith, Adam, 159, 179, 185, 199, 223, 266, 269, 302, 309–29, 330, 331, 333, 334, 338, 340, 346, 349, 354, 355, 358, 359, 361, 364
and Hume, 313
influence on Gibbon, 1
Essay on the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, 306, 311, 320, 321, 323, 328
Lectures on Jurisprudence, 312, 319–29
Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres, 312, 325
Theory of Moral Sentiments, 320
Smollett, Tobias, 257–8, 263
Socinus, 142–3
Socinianism, 11, 19, 150, 151, 271, 312
Socrates, 358
Somers, John, 166
Sophocles, 81
Spelman, Sir Henry, 247
Spencer, Herbert, 235
Spinoza, 388
Spinozists, 100, 145
stadial theory of society, 243, 309–45, 362, 363

Stephen, pope, 154
Stewart, Dugald, 314, 327, 329
Strahan, William, 373
stoicism, 273
style, literary, 273, 382–3, 387, 399, 401
Suabians, 39
Suleiman the Magnificent, sultan, 288
Swift, Jonathan, 171, 184

Tien-chu, 68, 100
Tacitus, 9, 85, 157, 166, 187, 188, 205, 273, 324, 376, 377, 399
Tasso, Torquato, 131
Temple, Sir John, 216
tenures, 244
  allodial, 124, 280, 281, 316, 329, 341
  feudal, 51, 59, 124, 168, 260, 263–4, 280, 281, 316, 329, 341
textual criticism, 22; *see also* philology
theism, 150–1
Theodoric, 44, 47
Theodosius, 44, 354
Thomason, George, 166
Thomson, William, 306
Thucydides, 184, 207, 217
Tiberius, emperor, 291, 344
Tillemont, Louis Sebastian Le Nain de, 369, 399
Toland, John, 68, 145, 388
Trajan, Emperor, 44, 376, 399
Treaty of Cateau-Cambresis, 297
Treaty of Nerchinsk, 97, 101, 118
Treaty of Passau, 297
Treaty of Utrecht, 90, 137, 170, 172, 219, 275, 276, 349
Turenne, Maréchal, 88
Tyrrell, William, 33

Unitarians, 151
University of Edinburgh, 284
Urban VIII, Pope, 128

Valentinian III, Emperor, 43
Vane, Sir Henry, 212, 217, 257
Varro, 85
Vasa, Gustavus, 139
Venturi, Franco, 2, 4, 30, 64, 266–7
Vertot, Abbé de, 171
Vico, Giambattista, 30, 40
Virgil, 85, 187, 353, 380, 388
virtù, 86, 331, 346, 354
virtue, 10, 42, 89, 180, 256–57, 265, 376
  martial, 269
  see also Corruption, Narrative, classical
Vitruvius, 85
Voltaire, François Arouet de, 2, 18, 23, 40, 97–159, 163, 165, 180, 201, 202, 239, 249, 257, 258, 275, 276, 277, 281, 289, 291, 300, 310, 327, 329, 334, 344, 352, 353, 355, 370, 374, 375, 376, 377, 390, 395, 396
  and Enlightenment, 73, 87
  and modernity, 104, 137
  influence on Gibbon, 1
  on Chinese history, 117, 155
  on oriental despotism, 111–12
  on Peter the Great, 81–2
  Essai sur les Moeurs, 72, 74, 80, 87, 97–136, 137, 139, 146, 147, 149, 153, 154, 155, 158, 195, 258, 277, 374, 376
  Essai sur l'Histoire Generale, 277
  Histoire de Charles XII, 74, 76–8
  Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand, 75, 79, 82, 83, 97, 113, 118
  Histoire de l'etablissement du Christianisme, 75
  La Philosophie de l'Histoire, 75, 107, 110, 118, 120
  Précis du siècle de Louis XIV, 75, 91, 93, 118
  Siècle de Louis XIV, 72, 74, 76, 80, 83, 87, 90–7, 101, 107, 108, 131, 137, 146, 156

Walpole, Sir Robert, 179, 186–7
Walters Art Gallery, 116
Warburton, William, 170, 200, 388
Warren, Mercy Otis, 257
War of Spanish Succession, 57
Wars of Religion, 121, 126, 297, 370
Watson, Robert, 304
Wentworth, Peter, 240
West, concept of, 29
William I, 48, 243, 253
William II, 48
William III of Orange, 89, 221, 224, 256
Witherspoon, John, 284
women, 167, 190, 256
  as *femmes philosophes*, 103
  as historians, 190
  as readers, 102–3, 168, 180–3, 185, 234
  as rulers, 233
  as viragos, 249
  as workers, 335–7
Wycliffe, John, 249

Xenophon, 387

Yakuts, 113
Yungching, emperor, 101

Zwingli, Ulrich, 139

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